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Billy Graham and the Age of Anxiety

by

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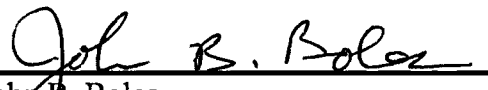
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Abstract

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Billy Graham is one of the most popular and influential religious figures of the American 20th century. This dissertation will examine the reasons for this popularity by considering the relationship between key aspects of Graham's message and the cultural anxieties that were present in America in the 1950s and 1960s. Focusing on the theme of Graham's conversion narratives and using theories derived from the social sciences, I will argue that Graham's success stemmed from his ability to tap into prevailing anxieties and provide a therapeutic response to them. My project will outline a genealogy of both the history of conversion narratives in the United States and the development of social scientific theories to understand those narratives. I will then give an account of Graham's third conversion narrative, the Forest Home story, and demonstrate the ways in which the story encapsulates Graham's fundamental message: certainty in the face of doubt. I will next examine Graham's teachings on gender and sex, and link his message to the anxiety over shifting gender roles in post-War America. Lastly, I will stray from the theme of conversion to examine Graham's eschatology and how it informed his views on race, politics, and civil religion. On the broadest level, this dissertation contributes to the discussion of the relationship between religious leaders and their culture - more specifically, the ways that religious leaders embody, address, and attempt to defuse cultural anxiety. The narrower objective of the dissertation is to bring to light the ways Graham addressed the anxieties of the 1950s and 60s to obtain fame and power.

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Introduction

How does one measure influence? What does it mean that Billy Graham has spoken to more people face to face than anyone in history—over 215 million in 99 countries and an estimated two billion through television?¹ Or to have written over thirty books that have sold millions of copies, to have published a syndicated newspaper column still in print after over a half century, to have produced films, magazines, and radio programs each viewed and consumed by millions? How does one explain the effect that Graham has had on the scores of politicians to whom he has been a confidant—including most of the presidents from Eisenhower to George W. Bush? Are we looking at a Protestant Pope?

Through scholarly works, television specials, journalistic reporting, and popular media, answers to the aforementioned questions have been put forward as to why, how, and what made Graham as famous and influential as he was. Many have tried to answer these questions.² Contradictory conclusions have posited Graham as the architect and mastermind of his own success, as the hapless puppet of outside forces, or as the cipher of less visible undercurrents in society. Some have seen

¹ Wacker, *America's Pastor*. p.21. The only other possible rival for that claim is Pope John Paul II.

² Including: Aikman, *Billy Graham*; Barnhart, *The Billy Graham Religion*; Frady, *Billy Graham, a Parable of American Righteousness*; Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*; Long, *The Legacy of Billy Graham*; Long, *Billy Graham and the Beloved Community*; Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*; McLoughlin, *Billy Graham, Revivalist in a Secular Age*; Wacker, *America's Pastor*.

Graham's success diminished by the lack of intellectual vigor associated with his theology and message while others have attributed to Graham's preaching an underappreciated depth that contributed to his achievements. In the aggregate it is confusion: Graham was popular but perhaps superficially, he was influential but not powerful, and he was successful but only passingly so.

This project intends to clarify this confusion by shifting the type of questions asked of the Graham era; instead of asking *why* Graham was so successful, my project seeks to uncover the relationship between Graham and his historical setting. By shifting focus away from the purely biographical data of Graham's life, and looking towards the interplay between Graham's message and the culture in which it is rooted, we can gain a fuller perception of his significance. Through the thematic lens of conversion—the ultimate goal of any evangelist—I will explore the relationship between Graham, his culture and its anxieties by concentrating on their interactions and dynamics. In order to do so, this project will make several heuristic 'moves' that will limit the discussion on Graham in the hope of broadening the conclusions. I will make the case for understanding Graham as an ideal type or cultural self-object, limit the examination of Graham's biography to his rise and early successes in the 1950s and early 60s, and restrict the investigation of Graham to key aspects of his message, namely self-assurance, gender, and politics.

An in-depth examination of parts of Graham's ministry will allow the development of a more complete picture of Graham's significance. Graham will emerge as something between a cipher for the period and a therapeutic response to its anxieties as well as its triumphs. Graham can be understood as both salvific and

reifying for many of the ills of early post-war America. He embodies the fantasy of the time that fetishized a mythical past while plunging headlong into a promising, if troubled future.

Ideal type and cultural self-object are technical terms drawn from sociology and psychology respectively. Ideal type, or pure type, was formulated by Max Weber, in part to distinguish social from natural science. Weber used the concept to formulate general characteristics that did not necessarily correspond to one real or objective phenomenon. For example, with an ideal type of an American colonial era Protestant, Weber could point to character traits such as inner-worldly asceticism, rationalism, and moralism without referring to a single individual who embodied these traits.³ Cultural self-object comes from the realm of psychology, namely Self psychology developed primarily by Heinz Kohut. Self psychology was developed from extant psychoanalytic therapies in order to treat disorders centered on self image. Self-objects are “objects we experience as part of our self,”⁴ whereas a cultural self-object embodies the ideal or goals of a particular culture especially as it pertains to its unconscious or developmental impulses.⁵ Kohut was never systematic in his definition of the concept and at times advocated a more functionalist approach, meaning that one can better understand cultural self-objects by investigating what they do as opposed to what they are.⁶

³ Weber and Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. pp.95-144.

⁴ Kohut and Wolf, “The Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment.” p.250.

⁵ Kohut, *Self Psychology and the Humanities*. pp.224-229.

⁶ See: Miller, “Joel Osteen as Cultural Selfobject: Meeting the Needs of the Group Self and Its Individual Members in and from the Largest Church in America.” p.36.

For our purposes, viewing Billy Graham as an ideal type will mean that we are looking for the *pure* Billy Graham, the one that he presented for public consumption, and was embodied in his organization, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), and the one that is subjectively “Billy Graham.” What this means in practice is that we will not be concerned with any esoteric or hitherto unknown or unheard of piece of personal history. Instead, we will cleave to the major public statements and established narratives even if they are partial or complete fabrication. In fact, fabrications themselves will be instructive in explaining Graham and his environs as they suggest something taboo or at least embarrassing about the truth. Graham as a cultural self-object is similar to Graham as ideal type in form but different in heuristic function. As a cultural self-object, that is, someone who became a self-object for the culture of his time, Graham can help elucidate many of the anxieties of the time if he is viewed as a therapeutic response to those ills. For example, as we will see in chapter three, Graham’s espousal of a hyper-masculine Christianity can be understood as reflection and response to cultural anxieties surrounding the changing gender roles. The two concepts will help us theorize about Graham’s relationship to his historical time and place, and his success therein.

There are multiple reasons why the scope of the investigation of Graham’s career is limited here to his earlier years—roughly up to 1965. The most important reason is that these were his most active and influential years. Between 1955 and 1965 Graham staged 132 full-scale crusades; the number for the time between 1966 and 1976 is only 57.⁷ Graham began gaining national—mainstream—fame in 1949

⁷ Graham, *Just as I Am*. p.736.

with his Los Angeles “Canvas Cathedral” crusade with the help of publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst who saw in Graham a fellow anti-communist warrior.⁸ His star continued to rise through the support of Henry Luce, owner of the magazines *Time* and *Life* (amongst others), and through a string of successful European tours. Graham’s apogee and defining moment for this era is undoubtedly his 1957 New York City crusade, which established him as the most influential popular Protestant preacher and a national celebrity, and where he shrugged off the final ties to his fundamentalist past and fully embodied what was now being called new or neo-evangelicalism, incorporated though the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).

Another reason for constraining the historical era pertains to the nature of this project. What interests us is the interplay between Graham and his culture. This necessarily involves making subjective or generalist statements, e.g., ideal type, statements about the mood, feelings, and anxieties of the surrounding people. Broadening the examined length of time risks overgeneralization and simplification. The rabidly anti-Communist, hyper-masculine, totally self-assured Billy Graham that comes into focus in the chapters to come is an expression of a particular time and place, which if overextended hinders the effort to illustrate both Graham and his cultural surroundings. One final reason for restricting the historical period of the project is practical: the mountain of material on or by Billy Graham in his early years is big enough without including material from his entire corpus, which spans over a half century.

⁸ Mainstream fame because Graham had already garnered a reputation in the insular fundamentalist world.

Chapter one will follow the genealogy of both the history of conversion and evangelism in the United States as well as the social scientific theories concerning religious conversion. These genealogies are the foundation on which the investigation of Graham will rest. They will provide both an important historical context out of which Graham developed, and a glimpse into the theoretical thinking that will inform my investigation of Graham's ministry. This is important because it offers insight into the limits and scope of the project and because I intend be more implicit than explicit when dealing with theory during the following chapters. This implicit use of theory begs the question as to how to categorize the project. Is this psychohistory? Historiography? Or none of the above? I see this project following the lineage of History of Religions in that it seeks to understand a religious historical figure through social scientific lenses without reducing said figure to theoretical conclusions, whilst at the same time approaching the subject critically in order to draw out hitherto unacknowledged tensions and sources within his beliefs and proclamations. As the literature review below and the subsequent chapter on social scientific theories of conversion will show, most of the methodological and theoretical constructions I will employ are in this vein of the reductive but not totalistic, meaning that they do not take religious claims at face value nor do they declare, *carte blanche*, to fully account for all aspects of religious life. It is this middle ground that I will seek to occupy.

Chapters two and three will examine two very different aspects of Graham's ministry through the lens of his conversion narratives. Chapter two shall use Graham's Forest Home conversion narrative, where he renounces all doubt in Biblical authority and the veracity of his calling, to explore the sense of certainty in the face of

a complex, pluralistic world in Graham's ministry. Chapter three will examine Graham's message on gender roles and sexuality primarily through the lens of his first conversion narrative, the walk down the sawdust trail at a tent revival in his early teens. This chapter will also explore the ways in which Graham used masculinity to combat the shifting mores around sexuality and gender.

Chapter four will break from the mold of using Graham's conversion narratives as thematic center to look at the disparate social outcomes of Graham's embrace of an eschatology called premillennial dispensationalism. This eschatology, which will be addressed in detail in this chapter, is a paradoxical set of beliefs that expect the world to end soon, encourages rapt attention to every detail, news item, and geo-political shift in order to precisely predict the end, and encourages evangelism to save unbelievers. Dispensationalism is usually depicted as world denying because of its belief in the inevitability of the world's destruction, but it nevertheless attempts to enact change, political or otherwise, in a world that is seen as damned. This chapter will explore Graham's belief in dispensationalism and examine the interaction between religion, the cold war, and the civil rights movement during the 50s and 60s.

Who's Who: Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Liberals

Any discussion of conservative Protestants in the 20th century is bound to have a definitional problem. Whom are we talking about and what do they believe? The topic has spawned book length investigations as well as introductory disclaimers

such as this one.⁹ The definitional problem is manifold. The definition of who is a fundamentalist or evangelical changes throughout the course of the century—indeed Billy Graham is the agent of some of that change. Additionally, the connotations of fundamentalist, liberal, and evangelical shift over the century allowing for the possibility that a believer may not self-identity with the group whose beliefs they agree with. And, lastly, none of the groups is monolithic so any categorization will either include too many or exclude too few.

With all of that said, for the purposes of this project we will need a working definition in order to proceed. A fundamentalist will be defined as a conservative Protestant who followed the split from mainstream Protestantism at the beginning of the century and developed a subculture based on the beliefs of Biblical literalism, creationism, and dispensationalism, and who separates himself from the greater Christian community in the name of doctrinal purity. An evangelical will be defined as a conservative Protestant whose theological beliefs are nearly in line with the fundamentalists but who views the latter's strict separation from those not professing a similar belief to be counterproductive to spreading the gospel. And a liberal Christian will be defined as anyone who does not see the three beliefs of the historical veracity of Scripture, the imminent second coming, and a direct personal relationship with Christ as absolute requirements of the Christian faith.

⁹ Two of the best book length accounts are: Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*; Smith and Emerson, *American Evangelicalism*.

Billy Graham: A Primer

The following chapters will focus on particular aspects of Graham's life and career to illustrate a broader point about his significance. In order to orient the reader, I am going to provide a brief biographical overview of Graham's life. This account will be the 'established' account in so far as that is possible. For this version I will draw primarily on the basic canon on Graham: William Martin's *A Prophet with Honor* (1991), Grant Wacker's *America's Pastor* (2014), and Billy Graham's *Just As I Am* (1997).¹⁰

William Franklin Graham, Jr., was born November 7th, 1918, on a small dairy farm outside of Charlotte, North Carolina. The Graham family was prosperous but not wealthy and survived the Great Depression better off than most of its neighbors. Both Graham's parents, William Franklin, Sr., and Morrow, were religiously active and belonged to the conservative Reformed Presbyterian Church.

At the age of 16, Graham experienced his first conversion in the presence of an old tent revivalist named Mordecai Ham. After this experience, Graham began to orient his life towards the ministry. After graduating high school in 1936 and spending a summer selling Fuller hairbrushes door to door, Graham began studying at Bob Jones College, a then unaccredited Bible-college under the strict tutelage of the influential fundamentalist, Bob Jones. Graham chafed under the strict rules at Bob Jones and transferred to Florida Bible Institute in 1937, another unaccredited Bible-college.

¹⁰ All of these works will be explained in greater detail in the literature section below.

After another life changing conversion experience, this time late at night on the 18th green of the golf course near the Institute, Graham enrolled at Wheaton College determined to become a minister—though he received a degree in anthropology. After graduating in 1943 and in the same year marrying his classmate, Ruth Bell, Graham briefly pastored a small church near Wheaton. Unsited for this type of work, Graham eventually joined with Torrey Johnson to be the first full-time evangelist for a program called Youth for Christ (YFC). Johnson's program sought to attract teens in major cities by presenting the gospel in vaudevillian and outlandish ways. YFC was an immediate and surprising success, and Graham and a handful of other young Christians gained notoriety within their fundamentalist/evangelical subculture.

One of Graham's cohorts, Charles 'Chuck' Templeton, was a young Canadian who would later give up the showmanship of YFC to attend seminary at Princeton—a decision that cost him his Christian faith—was pivotal in Graham's third conversion experience. The Forest Home narrative, as it has come to be known, occurred in the mountains outside of Los Angeles in 1949, when Graham, confronted by Templeton over the authority and authorship of the Bible, vowed never again to question God's authority and to preach the Bible with certainty.

Graham's big break into larger American culture came just a few months after the Forest Home conversion at his Canvas Cathedral crusade in L.A. There, after a few slow weeks with little success but much praying, Graham found himself surrounded by attentive newspapermen. Surprised, Graham was handed a telegram

written by the newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst, telling his reporters to “puff Graham.”

After the L.A. crusade pushed Graham into the limelight, he set up the structures to help him stay there: he and his associates founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) that paid them regular salaries in place of the more common practice of traveling evangelists of accepting ‘love-offerings’ as payment; He started a radio show, newspaper advice column, two magazines, and instituted what he called the ‘Modesto Manifesto,’ a set of rules for him and his colleagues to follow so as not to fall victim to the suspicions faced by many itinerant evangelists, including never being alone with a woman that was not your wife and never accepting cash-money for revivals.

Graham had a string of successful crusades in the 1950s, including multiple trips to Europe. His biggest success of the 50s came during the 1957 New York City crusade. N.Y.C. was a success for a number of reasons; it lasted from May 15th to September 2nd and drew record crowds at Madison Square Garden and Yankee Stadium. A more lasting success, but one less obvious at the time, was the split from Graham’s fundamentalist supporters. Graham had been moving away from his former teachers primarily because of their inability to cooperate with anyone not espousing their form of doctrinal purity as well as the hardline defense of segregation. In the lead up to the NYC crusade Graham worked not only with the more liberal National Council of Churches, but also with popular figures such as Norman Vincent Peale, and during the crusade, Graham invited Martin Luther King Jr. onstage to perform the invocation; both actions were clear messages to the strict fundamentalists. In line with

this break Graham had joined and become involved with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)—an organization that held much of the same theology as the fundamentalists but was willing to work with more liberal Christian or even non-Christians in the service of spreading the gospel. Graham and his cohorts have been called the new evangelicals or neo-evangelicals and were so successful that today we no longer use the preface neo—they represent evangelicalism.

The tumultuous years of the 1950s and 60s proved to be Graham's most successful. Though Graham had his critics, most notably Reinhold Niebuhr, Graham's popularity proved to be lasting. The three most enduring critiques of Graham have been his moderate stance on desegregation, his full-throated approval of the Vietnam War, and his cozy relationship to politicians and people in power. Of the last, Graham's close relationship and defense of Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal hurt Graham's public image. But by that time Graham was already becoming an elder statesman in the world of evangelicalism and was beginning to focus more attention on worldwide evangelism. Graham shied away from publicly supporting the New Christian Right during the culture wars of the 80s and 90s and adopted a less public role in politics—though he has not always succeeded in that path. Today, Graham is 98 years old and his son, Franklin Graham, runs BGEA. Until very recently, Graham was still courted for photo ops by any politician, left or right, looking for easy respectability, and his son has made friends and promoted many far-right politicians. Graham's reputation and popularity have endured. When Graham dies, he will be remembered as the most popular and influential American religious figure of the 20th century.

Two of Graham's three conversion narratives will be discussed at length in the pages to come, but a brief introduction here will be beneficial. Graham's first conversion occurred in adolescence when an itinerant revivalist, Mordecai Ham, preached hell and brimstone sermons that affected young Graham. This conversion was accompanied by superficial changes in Graham's everyday life; indeed, he had already been a committed member of his church and was hardly a wild child. The conversion opened up the possibility of a life in the ministry which is how Graham came to study at the Florida Bible Institute outside of Tampa Bay, Florida. The institute was situated on a former country club and had been converted to a sort of hybrid college/conference center where the students functioned as unpaid workers for visiting fundamentalists.¹¹ Graham's second conversion occurred on the 18th green of the golf course at the school. A woman he was courting had recently turned him down, and reeling from this rejection, Graham began to question his purpose. After a long walk, Graham wound up on the golf course after midnight, where, kneeling on the green's short grass, he rededicated himself to God and to preaching. Graham's third conversion narrative occurred outside of Los Angeles right before his breakthrough crusade in 1949. At a small gathering in a convention center tucked into the San Bernardino Mountains, Graham became worried that he was not educated enough to understand the theological discussions taking place at the conference. Graham left the meeting and wandered into the woods with his Bible. At a tree stump, Graham again kneeled and pledged himself to God, only this time he also promised never again to question God's authority or speculate on the divine authorship of

¹¹ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.70. Martin calls it a "Fundamentalist resort hotel."

scripture. All of Graham's conversions are, in effect, rededications of one kind or another. Throughout his career he used these stories didactically, repeating them over and over, in print and in sermons, with the purpose of teaching others how they ought to approach Christianity. It is these stories that will be the central to the theme of this dissertation.

Literature

The primary and secondary literature on Graham is substantial. Graham has published 33 books, written a newspaper column "My Answer" that debuted in 1952 and continues to be published today, aired a weekly radio program "Hour of Decision," founded and contributed to two magazines "Christianity Today" and "Decision," developed a syndicated television program of his sermons that also continues today, and has preached thousands of sermons at his various crusades, many of which have been archived either at Wheaton's Billy Graham Center for Evangelism or through the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Though Graham is the only listed author of all of these, he admits the he could never had written or produced them all.¹² The primary sources that I have drawn from are his early works in the late 1940s, 50s, and 60s. I have used his published works, such as *America's Hour of Decision* (1951), *Peace with God* (1953), *Billy Graham Talks to Teenagers* (1958), *My Answer* (1960), and *World Aflame* (1965). I have cited sermons either from published texts such as *Revival in our Time* (1950) and *The Challenge: Sermons from Madison Square Garden* (1969), or from the archived transcripts at Wheaton,

¹² Graham, *Just as I Am*. pp.731-735

available online, and from his radio addresses, which can be accessed through the BGEA website.

I have restricted my research to these primary sources, as opposed to more arcane newspaper articles, journal entries, or correspondence, for a number of reasons. The Graham I am searching for in this project is the *public* Graham. That Graham did not personally author every one of the aforementioned texts does not pose a problem because this project is not after the inner thoughts of Graham. The goal is rather to explore the cultural Graham that appealed to so many. Furthermore, I have limited the sources to his early career for that was when Graham was at his most influential and his message during this era was more cohesive than in his later works. As Graham grew older, some of his positions began to soften, a process that occurred in fits and starts and continues today through statements published through BGEA in Graham's name—though many speculate that his son, Franklin, is responsible for their content. Graham after Nixon and Watergate was a different Graham whose primary interest shifted towards global evangelicalism and in becoming something of an elder statesman to burgeoning evangelists with whom Graham sometimes disagreed. Lastly, I chose to limit the material to the early period and the most popular works for the practical reason of not wanting to swim through the mountain of primary sources on or by Graham that say much the same thing as the ones I have chosen.

William Martin's work, *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (1991) is still the authoritative source on Graham's life, ministry, and historical setting. Martin, a sociologist, provides insight and detail for Graham's life and career

until the late 1980s.¹³ His work is not only well researched and executed, but he is also remarkably close to being an ‘objective observer.’ Rarely does he attempt to pass judgment or qualify Graham’s actions. A large portion of the historical portrait in my project will come from either Martin’s work, his citations, or from the questions that he leaves open.

Grant Wacker’s *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (2014) is the most recent and substantial of the other important secondary sources on Graham. Wacker’s work is not a comprehensive biography in the style of Martin’s but it does cover nearly all the important questions and facets of Graham’s career. *America’s Pastor* is well researched and has provided me with numerous references to primary sources. Wacker’s work has a number of flaws that affect the work. To start, Wacker has attempted to synthesize and pass judgment on Graham’s entire, long career. The effect of this attempt is a consistent dampening of Wacker’s critique of Graham’s early career. This would be less of a problem if Wacker did not come across as an apologist for Graham, attempting to explain away Graham’s fundamentalist side and over-emphasize the liberal evangelical aspects of Graham’s career.

Wacker’s work forms the cornerstone of one side of burgeoning historical debate on how to understand the life and times of Billy Graham. Wacker, along with a number of other scholars, presents Graham as fundamentally different from both his fundamentalist predecessors and his Christian Right successors. Others have highlighted aspects of Graham’s career that either put him squarely in the

¹³ A new edition is planned that will cover the remainder of Graham’s life.

fundamentalist lineage as a necessary step between pre-WWII separatist fundamentalists and politically active Christian conservatives of the late 70s and 80s. This latter position is shared by some odd bedfellows, consisting of scholars as well as current fundamentalists such as Graham's own son, Franklin.

The side of the debate that understands Graham as more on a fundamentalist continuum than on a moderate one has been advanced by Stephen P. Miller and Michael G. Long. These scholars are more critical of Graham's career especially as it pertains to Graham's self professed political neutrality, his stance on the Vietnam War, and his role or lack thereof in the civil rights movement. Long's work, *Billy Graham and the Beloved Community* (2006), takes Graham to task for his waffling and gradualist position during this tumultuous era.¹⁴ Miller's *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (2009) is the most fully formed and coherent expression of the historiography that approaches Graham critically. Miller's work is respected and cited by both Long and Wacker and in it one finds some of the most persuasive arguments concerning Graham's politics, stance on race, and position vis-à-vis fundamentalism.

Another set of secondary works on Graham focuses on particular aspects of his life or ministry. Works such as *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants* (2009) by Andrew Finstuen, *The Rhetorical Leadership of Fulton J. Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale, and Billy Graham in the Age of Extremes* (2013) by Timothy H. Sherwood, and *The Preacher and the Presidents* (2007) by Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy provide nuance to specific aspects of Graham's life that will be invaluable for the

¹⁴ Long's edited volume, *The Legacy of Billy Graham* (2008), takes Graham to task for a number of other issues as well.

project. Additional works such as William McLoughlin's *Billy Graham: Revivalist in a Secular Age* (1960) and Joe Barnhart's *The Billy Graham Religion* (1972) help conceptualize how scholars close to the time of Graham's peak influence were thinking and writing about his life.

Additionally, I will occasionally refer to texts that fall in the spectrum of what one could call Graham hagiography. Authorized biographies and motivational works on Graham's life abound. I will include a number of these in my project because they illuminate the image that Graham was trying to project of himself. Though factually the least reliable, these sources illustrate Graham's cultural self. These will include John Pollock's *Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography* (1966), and David Aikman's *Billy Graham: His Life and Influence* (2007).

Another set of historiography will help position Graham in his unique place as a conduit between the decline and revitalization of Protestantism in the U.S. This will focus on the era dating from the Civil War to WWII and will also touch upon historiographies of earlier periods to give context to the discussion. Major themes in this set of historiography are the Protestant spilt of the late 19th and early 20th century, the evangelical "mindset," the relationship between Protestants and culture, and the rise and fall of fundamentalism.

To establish questions of the evangelical mindset and its history before the Civil War, I will draw largely upon the work of John Boles and Donald Mathews. Boles' *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (1972) examines the preconditions for the Great Revival of 1801-1805. Boles argues that the revival determined what would become the Southern evangelical mindset, and therefore

ingrained itself in the mores of Southern society. This mindset was individualistic in the sense that revival preachers began to measure success by how many people they converted to Christ, and understood that conversion in individualistic terms.

Mathews' *Religion in the Old South* (1977) reviews the history of the evangelical movement in the U.S from the late 18th Century to the Civil War. Mathews forms the questions and narrative that other historians will respond to and draw upon, particularly, the dissent to dominance narrative, as well as the vital role of the relationship between evangelicals and slavery in understanding the movement itself.

The work of three authors, George Marsden, Robert Wuthnow, and Joel Carpenter, will be instrumental in portraying the vicissitudes of American Protestantism in the 20th century. Works by Darren Dochuk, David Watt, Timothy Sherwood, Randall Balmer, and William Martin will also contribute to the discussion of the movement and changes within American Protestantism and the concurrent changes in American culture throughout the 20th century.

Marden's works, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (2006) and *Reforming Fundamentalism* (1987) are regarded as two of the most in-depth and well-informed studies of evangelicalism and fundamentalism in America. They will play a major role in informing my discussion of the history of the related movements during the pivotal times of the 1950s and 60s. Marsden rarely uses psychological language to describe the undercurrents of the movements, therefore I see my project as complementary to the historical narrative that he and others present; analytic tools will add depth and nuance to that portrait.

Joel Carpenter's *Revive us Again* (1997) is another pivotal work in the narrative of Fundamentalist subculture to evangelical dominance. His work specifically looks at the time between the Fundamentalist defeat in the late 1920s and the birth of the new evangelicalism in the late 1940s. Carpenter takes us where Marsden leaves off in *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, and is particularly important for this project because it addresses the crucial period directly prior to Graham's rise to prominence. Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion* (1988) is widening in scope, examines changes in the religious landscape in American after WWII. Though less focused than Marsden or Carpenter's works, Wuthnow's book is helpful in that he includes liberal and mainstream Protestantism as a major component of his work.

Dochuk's *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt* (2011) and Martin's *With God On Our Side* (1996) are two excellent works that help explain the political shift among conservative Protestants that was concurrent with the shift towards neo-evangelicalism in the 1950s; each recognizes the importance of Billy Graham in this shift.

A number of works, including some of the ones just mentioned, will inform a discussion of evangelicalism more broadly, both before and after the time period that will be the major focus of this project. These works include Nancy Ammerman's *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (1990) and *Bible Believers* (1987); Randal Balmer's *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (1989) and *Blessed Assurance* (1999); Susan Friend Harding's *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (2000); Glenn Shuck's *Marks of the Beast* (2005); Christian

Smith's *American Evangelicalism* (1998); and Sydney Ahlstrom's *A Religious History of the American People* (1972). This diverse selection of scholarship on American religion will lend a plurality of voices and opinions to my project.

Two major issues during the era will require sets of scholarship to inform my discussion; those areas are race and the cold war. It would be impossible to discuss American culture in the 1950s and early 60s without acknowledging and focusing on the civil rights movement and the role race played in identity formation, especially in evangelicals. Paul Harvey's *Freedom's Coming* (2005) offers a sweeping history of the relationship between race and religion in the South from reconstruction through the civil rights movement. Harvey focuses on the interrelation of three concepts: "theological racism," "racial interchange," and "Christian interracialism."

Additionally, the works of Michael Emerson and Christian Smith in *Divided by Faith* (2000), Michael Long's *Billy Graham and the Beloved Community* (2006), Charles Irons' *The Origin of Proslavery Christianity* (2008), Andrew Manis' *A Fire You Can't Put Out* (1999), David Chappell's *A Stone of Hope* (2004), and Charles March's *God's Long Summer* (1997) will add to the discussion of the relationship between conservative Protestantism and the civil rights movement, and race and religion in America more generally.

Another group of texts will inform a conversation on the culture of the Cold War, the fears of nuclear armageddon, and the religious response to those forces and discourses. These works will include J. Ronald Oakley's *God's Country* (1986); Scoot Zeeman and Michael Amundson's *Atomic Culture* (2004); Stephen Whitfield's *The Culture of the Cold War* (1991); Dianne Kirby's *Religion and the Cold War*

(2003); and Paul Boyer's *When Time Shall Be No More* (1992) and *By Bomb's Early Light* (1985). Though not exhaustive, this list of books will make up the backbone of the historical and sociological data that I will draw on throughout the project.

Theoretical

In terms of the theoretical apparatus or the conceptual framework of the project, I will draw heavily on Obeyesekere's *Work of Culture* (1990). My project will adopt the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of Obeyesekere's and apply them to the investigation of Billy Graham in the 1950s and 60s.

In many ways, Obeyesekere's vision of the work of culture is the anthropological side of the psychoanalytic philosopher Paul Ricoeur, or Ricoeur in practice. Obeyesekere sees that within Freud there are both progressive and regressive philosophic tendencies in regards to health, religion, and pathology, and Obeyesekere employs that dialectical outlook when he examines eastern religion. In doing so, Obeyesekere can break away from a pathological model of the study of art, culture, and especially religion. The "work of culture" is the process in which symbolic forms are created and transformed on a level bigger or more shared than the individual, in that there is a *transformation and formation of symbolic form*. There are personal symbols and collective representations, the latter give expression to something greater than individual development (although individual development is involved) and they express the way the society develops and the nature of the relationship between individual and culture. Not confined to deep motivation in the Freudian sense, the symbols can produce a historical dialectic or "debate" that yields alternative myth

versions that have a different relation to the deep motivations that instigated the original myth (such as elective affinities, in a Weberian sense).

The ‘work’ of culture is a creative act, a transformation of negativity, in line with Freud’s notion of working through in therapy. It is a progressive movement of unconscious thought that involves the transformation of archaic motivations into symbols that look forward to the resolution of conflict and beyond that into the nature of the sacred or numinous. Additionally, Obeyesekere differentiates between personal and collective symbols: personal symbols are articulated in a life story that take part in shared cultural symbols, while collective symbols represent the experience and social consciousness of the people at large.

My project will adopt some of the language and much of the ethos of Obeyesekere; I will use his model of interaction between personal and collective symbols, in that religious symbols can represent both progressive and regressive forces. This will help explain the ways in which Graham embodies cultural symbols and uses his own personal history and ideals to fuel the collective deep motivations of the nation.

Instrumental in describing the ways in which this process can occur will be Heinz Kohut’s Self psychology. This approach has its roots in classic psychoanalysis but moves beyond Freud’s positions in a number of ways. Besides replacing the centrality of Oedipal dynamics in development (though not to the point of dismissal), Self psychology largely does away with the mechanical view of classical drive theory. Instead, it posits two types of libidinal energy, object and narcissistic. Not used in a pejorative sense, narcissistic libido is just as important as object libido.

Developmental stages (usually those earlier than the Oedipal complex) result in two forms of consolation, the grandiose self and the idealized parental imago; these generally yield the healthy poles of Ambitions and Ideals, but can also be a source of pathology. The general therapeutic goal of Self psychology is to mature into the Cohesive self. Kohut employs the term Cosmic Narcissism, which is similar to Freud's famous (or infamous, depending on whom you ask) oceanic feeling, but is understood by Kohut as a qualitatively positive thing.

Particularly important to my project will be Kohut's analytical concepts of the grandiose self, the idealized parental imago, and mirroring. As mentioned above, the first two concepts are usually described in terms of consolation for the necessary traumas of development. Both can be understood in terms of internalization, which following classical psychoanalysis, is the highly ambivalent way in which external mores, proscriptions, and ideals are incorporated into the individual's personality or ego. The grandiose self focuses more on the inflated self image while the idealized parental imago is the storehouse for the inflated view of the parental unit, which in turn informs the conscience. Both concepts can be subsumed under Freud's classification of super-ego; however because that concept was so overdetermined and yet unsystematically explained in Freud's work, Kohut's distinctions add analytical weight to the original. Mirroring refers to ways in which individuals project their grandiose selves and their idealized parental imagos onto objects (people, ideologies, even actual objects) in culture and, the ways in which culture can reflect those values, on a collective level, back towards individual members. Miller and Carlin's article "Joel Osteen as Cultural Selfobject" uses Self psychology to examine Osteen's mega-

church. Though their article is much shorter and less in-depth than the project laid out here, it will act as a signpost for the ways in which Self psychology can be used to investigate an American Protestant preacher. Additionally, the differences and similarities between Joel Osteen and Billy Graham will illustrate the different needs and deep motivations of American culture in their respective time periods.

Two other authors will be included as their psychoanalytically informed theories illuminate qualities of religious leaders and their societies otherwise left hidden. Those authors are Sudhir Kakar and Jeffrey Kripal. Kakar's works, especially *The Inner World* (1978) and *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors* (1982), agree with Obeyesekere and Ricour's general view of psychoanalysis. Kakar uses terminology and theory of the west, particularly psychoanalysis, not just to deconstruct and analyze the east but also to assimilate and resurrect the wisdom of India and its culture. Kakar sees some universals though he tends towards a constructivism that problematizes the implementation of one cultural construction upon another. These universals include the tension between individualism and collectivism, the creation of gender roles (in whatever form), and some variant of a life cycle, and he recognizes the cultural side of each of these constructs. Kakar has an adaptive view of religion, as do Kohut and Kripal, in that religion can participate in a positive way to the growth of an individual and culture. Kripal's work *Kali's Child* (1995) offers an attempt to expose the unconscious homoerotic dimension of the religiosity of the Indian saint, Ramakrishna, while at the same time legitimating the ontological ground of his mystical visions. Both authors use psychoanalytically informed theories to deconstruct rather than pathologize the subject or cultures of their inquiry.

Additionally, both authors notice and highlight the central importance of the work of culture in informing the symbolic content of their subjects.

My project will adopt these theoretical approaches implicitly and at times explicitly. Throughout my investigation of Graham, these theoretical underpinnings will inform my understanding of the relationship between Graham, his believers, and his culture. I will draw out those connections at certain times over the course of my 'story' but have opted to also let the story tell itself with a more implicit nod to theory.

Chapter 1

The Stories of Conversion

The history and the social scientific study of conversion have long lineages. Before examining Graham's conversion stories in depth—the sawdust trail and the Forest Home—we will rehearse the lineages of conversion experience and its study, especially in its North American context. The discussion of both will help ground and situate how we understand Graham's experiences and the ways in which he represents them. In each case themes will appear that will contextualize our study of Graham.

In the case of the genealogy of conversion in the Anglo-Western world, we will observe the ways in which the function of the conversion narrative has changed over time, reflecting broader shifts towards individualization and modernization. In the social scientific study of conversion, we will tease out two opposing poles of reductionism that have remained remarkably stable over the last century of study. The two genealogies will help us understand the way in which Graham's narrative is linked to the past while also representing another step towards further individualism in evangelicalism, and will situate the way in which this study will approach philosophically the question of how to study that narrative.

Making the Evangelical Conversion

How does conversion go from being the qualification for church membership—and therefore also citizenship and voting rights—in early colonial New

England to checking a paper card in the ‘recommitment’ box distributed to a stadium full of people, while maintaining a remarkably similar form? The story, not surprisingly, is historically dense and multidimensional, with all the social, economic, theological, and political variations one could expect. Indeed, why limit the history to the last 400 years? Were there not conversions before the Puritans? Of course there were yet there is a qualitative difference between those early, pre-modern, conversion stories and the ones that interest us here. As Bruce Hindmarsh points out:

Clearly, context matters when it comes to conversion. It is safe to say that however much evangelicals owed to the theology of Paul, Augustine, and Luther, not many of the conversions in the eighteenth century owed much to Palestinian Judaism or Plotinus, or came as a result of a fine syntactical decision about a genitive (‘righteousness of God’) in the first chapter of Romans.¹⁵

The conversion narratives that gain in popularity with the Puritans and continue with the evangelicals of the Great Awakening and Great Revival are subjects to their own historical baggage, and reflect concerns and anxieties quite different from those even in Luther’s time. Hindmarsh asserts that Paul’s conversion is better understood through the context of Hebrew prophets, Augustine’s though the Neo-platonic pattern of the ascent of the soul, and Luther’s through the lens of a theologian reaching culminating insight after a lifelong struggle over ecclesiology.¹⁶ This is true only as far as it is analytically accommodating. Individual conversion experiences were contextually different in the first century from what they were in the 18th, just as one conversion experience in the 19th century is contextually different from another person’s in the same place and time. It is also clear that in Christian conversion

¹⁵ Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*. p.17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

experiences, similar tropes and themes apply, even when describing contextual differences. Whatever the level of indebtedness that modern conversion narratives owe to the past, the era that concerns us most here—from Puritan conversion narratives to the Great Awakening, Great Revival, and beyond—exhibits the defining traits of burgeoning individualism, anxious introspection, and symbolic self-recreation.

The earliest example of the model Puritan conversion narrative is Richard Kilby's *The Burthen of a Loaden Conscience* in 1608.¹⁷ Though lacking the narrative syntax that would define the genre later, Kilby's work includes many of its defining traits: spiritual self-examination, finding much to fault, the chronological account of the author's spiritual growth, and the conversion of his heart after he was ordained—signifying the importance of personal faith over and against the ecclesiastical structure (a central trope, especially for British Puritans who needed a way to differentiate themselves from the Anglican hierarchical system without fully abandoning it).¹⁸ The question of one's personal faith in regard to Church authority is not accidental, indeed it is at the heart of the rise of the conversion narrative.

The rise of the conversion narrative genre makes sense in the context of dissatisfaction with the Reformation in Elizabethan England. Because the Puritans were wary of myths, symbols, and the authority of the Church structure that they believed did not progress far enough in its reform, they turned towards a more individualistic, linguistic form of exposition and interpretation.¹⁹ As historian Jerald

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 38.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp.39-40.

¹⁹ Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism." p.229.

Brauer put it: “Only the written and spoken word could be trusted as an adequate vehicle for Christian Faith.”²⁰ This emphasis extended to the religious movements in New England but with a shift in context. As opposed to their brethren in England, the colonists were no longer in the position of dissenters. One result of their newfound hegemony was the use of the conversion narrative as an admission requirement to churches.²¹ The success of the requirement in the succeeding generations dwindled but the importance and centrality of the conversion narrative remained.²²

There is continuity between the Puritan conversion narratives and those of the Great Awakening. By the early 1700s the Puritan focus on the ‘city on the hill’ had given way to terrestrial concerns of managing the towns and churches within a colony. Ministers such as Solomon Stoddard began to focus on the ethos of the conversion narrative on individuals in order to bolster his flock without the emphasis on church admission, with the attendant tests of genuineness.²³ Jonathan Edwards, Stoddard’s grandson, helped push the emphasis of the individual ethos of conversion even further by continuing his grandfather’s legacy of privileging evangelizing over church structure.²⁴ During the 1730s and 1740s, Edwards and George Whitefield contributed in unique ways to the Great Awakening, the burgeoning of evangelicalism that appeared to its adherents to be a glorious, spontaneous work of God.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*. p.48.

²² Brauer, “Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism.” p.237.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Marsden, *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards*. pp.38-39,

The form of the narrative remained relatively unchanged in the shift from Puritanism to evangelicalism, but there were important alterations. To start, the function of the narrative became quite different.

Whereas in New England Puritanism prior to the Great Awakening, conversion was the means whereby the purity of the church and the stability of the state were to be maintained, in both England and the Great Awakening conversion became the religious source to express an intense dissatisfaction with the religious and social status quo.²⁵

As a critique of the religious establishment, a characteristic with deep roots in the English Puritan ideals, the genre became a vehicle both to lament the passing of pious past and as a way to envision a community of likeminded members that did not rely on the bonds between Church and State, as was the case throughout much of New England. Another difference exhibited by the evangelicals of the Great Awakening was how they conveyed their testimony. The narrative was no longer given simply as a member of the church community rather “as a member of the broader public,” a broader public that included more public preaching and new religious magazines and journals created especially for conveying the successes of the revival.²⁶ These steps further freed the individual believer from the confines of an unfulfilling church or denomination, strengthening the general trend of the Reformation by putting more power into the hands of the pious believer and away from a rigid Church structure. As Hindmarsh frames it: “The eighteenth-century experience was distinguished in part by the extensive connectedness of local revival to revival elsewhere, to a world that transcended the local milieu of parish, denomination, or sect.”²⁷ The broader outreach

²⁵ Ibid. p.238.

²⁶ Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*. p.71.

²⁷ Ibid. p.70.

of conversion narratives was important not only because it shifted the relationship between Church and State, but the recruiting power of the genre to the continuous influx of immigrants became indispensable to the expansion of churches and sects.²⁸

Gradually, individual conversion narratives no longer stressed signs of dedication to a particular church, but expressed an individual, subjective change of heart and soul.²⁹ The shift in conversion narrative genre from New England Puritanism to the evangelicals of the Great Awakening had more to do with a shift of context, role, and influence than one of form. This shift corresponded to larger cultural forces that reflected greater individualization, such as republicanism and the ideology of the American Revolution.

The development of the theological side of this progression of individualization continued in the early years of the nineteenth century during the Great Revival. The Great Revival began in the frontier of the southern colonies in the borderlands of Tennessee and Kentucky. What began as camp revival meetings spurred a revival outbreak that was so fervent, so jarring, that news of it quickly spread throughout the region. Until this time, the South had been largely untouched by the events of the Great Awakening.³⁰ The established Anglican Church in the South had neither the ability nor the volition to care for the religious needs of a majority of the population.³¹ The rural nature of the region, the failings of the Anglican (and the Episcopal) Church, and population issues such as high mortality rates, an unequal ratio favoring men to women, and a high influx of immigrants,

²⁸ Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism." p.239.

²⁹ Ibid. p.241.

³⁰ Boles, "Revivalism, Renewal, and Social Mediation in the Old South." p.60.

³¹ Boles, *The Great Revival*. p.1.

aligned to make the pre-nineteenth century South a godless place. Yet, gradual inroads by Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist (then still official part of the Anglican Church) ministers in the years before the turn of the century built a framework that would sustain a revival, a framework that had been lacking during the excitement of the Great Awakening.

The spectacle of the revival spread throughout the South like a fire. The Cane Ridge camp meeting of 1801 was not the first of the major revivals but it quickly became the most famous and something of an archetype. The scene was astounding: “Thousands of worshipers were scattered across the hillside. A cacophonous clamor of shouted sermons, chanted hymns, ecstatic hosannas, and mournful wailing filled the air already thick with the smell of smoke, sweat, and excitement.”³² The spectacle was not simply an excited crowd; the participants were positively raptured, rolling around on the ground, barking, dancing, falling, and singing and laughing.³³ News of these incredible happenings spread quickly and sparked similar revivals that would continue for four more years and leave an indelible mark on the religiosity of the South.

If the progression in the function of conversion narrative from Puritanism to evangelicalism can be understood as a gradual shift in emphasis away from the explicitly communal, then another big step in that direction was taken with the Great Revival. John Boles writes that in the Great Revival, “the ministers’ aim was immediate conviction and conversion. For this goal they had no overarching purpose

³² Ibid. p.65.

³³ Ibid. p.67. The sheer excitement and bizarre actions of the participants brings to mind the descriptions of the Azusa St. revival, some hundred years later in Los Angeles that sparked the Pentecostal movement.

beyond the development of individual Christians.”³⁴ Two correlates of this progression are important to note. The first is that in the Great Awakening, and even more so in the Great Revival, we see the rise of what George Marsden has called the trans-denominational aspect of evangelicalism.³⁵ The movement was never intended to simply strengthen one particular church or denomination, it presupposed a much broader community in which the individual was the key element. The second is the rise of the theological concept of perfectionism or sanctification. The concept is that after one’s conversion or new birth, moral and spiritual perfection are one step closer. This line of thinking opens up the possibility that one may become morally and spiritually perfect in one’s own lifetime, a sort of god in the temporal realm. This concept is an old one in Christianity and a controversial one.³⁶ Luther’s revolutionary emphasis on the priesthood of all believers opened the door for the concept and John Wesley brought it into fruition for the evangelical movement.³⁷ Wesley did not carry the idea through to its logical conclusions, as the Holiness and Pentecostalism movements he influenced did, and he did not state that perfection could be achieved fully in this life but certainly the seed of that thought was there.³⁸ What is important about perfectionism for our understanding of the progression of individualization in evangelicalism is that it provided a blueprint of what a proper evangelical should aspire to, in which the emphasis was placed solely on the individual. Anything

³⁴ Ibid. p.125.

³⁵ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. p.64.

³⁶ For an example of the terrible things that occur when people believe they have achieved spiritual perfection on earth, See: Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

³⁷ Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*. pp.477-478.

³⁸ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*. pp.18-19.

socially oriented was simply assumed as a byproduct of the perfectionist oriented individual.

The final piece of the puzzle in the development of the ideal individualistic conversion narrative arose with the preaching of Dwight K. Moody. Moody (1837-1899) was, in many ways, the perfect gilded age preacher. A successful traveling shoe-salesman who became involved in evangelism through the burgeoning YMCA organization, Moody had only a fifth-grade level education.³⁹ Moody's theology mirrored his education; the historian George Marsden quipped: "His theology, although basically orthodox, was ambiguous to the point of seeming not to be theology at all."⁴⁰ Instead, Moody was pragmatic in his orthodoxy; he was one of the last figures to straddle the widening divide between liberal and conservative Protestants, and used energy and sentiment to win over crowds as well as a healthy dose of fear and damnation.⁴¹

Moody was immensely popular but he was also at the center of a major transition in American religion. As such he regularly preached to massive crowds. Also, as a man at the end of the 19th century, he was wary of requesting public emotional declarations of faith.⁴² Before Moody's innovations, the standard procedure for potential converts was to bring them to the front of the room to the 'anxious bench' so that they could be exhorted more directly by the revivalist—a procedure perfected by Charles G. Finney. Moody experimented and then perfected another procedure introduced by Finney, in which potential converts were led into

³⁹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. pp-32-39.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.32.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.33.

⁴² Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody, American Evangelist, 1837-1899*. pp.262-263,.

smaller confines, “after meetings” or inquiry rooms, after the meeting had concluded.⁴³ There the potential converts would hear another hymn and a brief sermon by Moody before breaking up into smaller groups to hear one last appeal from Moody or one of his associates. Moody gauged the success of his revivals more by the success of these after meetings, though unlike his successors he did not count and publicize the tally of converts.⁴⁴ Moody refrained from publicizing the count of converts but newspapers and friendly magazines and never did; following each major rally the number of ‘professed converts’ was regularly distributed. Moody’s other innovation was using cards on which converts would write their personal information, information that would then be passed on to local churches who could follow up with the signee.

The effect of the innovations was twofold. On the one hand it further streamlined the revival process. What at one time was seen to be entirely the work of God was now something more like industrial art: publicity plus large choir plus personal prayer rooms equals revival. On the other hand, Moody’s innovations further individualized the process of conversion. This is counterintuitive because Moody’s conversions were coming in such large communal settings. Despite the setting, converts no longer had to make public declarations to large crowds or prove their faith; they simply had to walk down the aisle, profess to an eager listener, and sign a piece of paper. After his decline and death, Protestants were split in determining how to save their religion from secular and modernist dangers. Conservative Protestants bucked the liberal trend of emphasizing the authority of Scripture by making

⁴³ Ibid. p.263.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

literalism and inerrancy central tenets of their beliefs, and dispensationalism fit right in with this mindset.

This short foray into the lineage of conversion in evangelicalism helps us situate Graham's narrative. To start, Graham's seemingly strange need for a conversion narrative in spite of previously being very much a part of the congregation and tradition makes more sense. The problem of the second (and third and so on) generation members of a tradition that places so much importance on personal piety is part of what made the conversion narrative such a powerful tool, even if it implicitly negated the notion of a dramatic change. Another seemingly awkward aspect of Graham's narrative that we will see in the next chapter, his concern with his lack of emotion, is mirrored in the history of the genre itself. The push and pull of the testable Puritan narrative, the emotional but rational decisions vis-à-vis Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening, and the raw, ecstatic excesses of the Great Revival, highlight the spectrum of the acceptable emotional responses to the conversion moment. Wesleyan perfectionism later begot the Holiness and Pentecostal movements on the one hand and deterministic Calvinistic Puritanism on the other; the revival tradition that Graham was a part of was a confluence of both lineages.

Understanding conversion through the social sciences

The link between the social sciences and the study of religious conversion is strong. In the American academy, conversion was the first major topic of interest for the burgeoning field of psychology of religion, and the findings of those scholars shape much of the dialogue surrounding the study today. This section will provide a

short genealogy of the social scientific study of religious conversion, focusing on the theme of reductionism and the tension that it has produced in the social sciences. The investigation of the study of religious conversion illustrates the tensions that are manifest throughout the field. In the process of unraveling this knot, the focus on reductionism will lead to the philosophical outlook that will inform our approach to the subject of religious phenomena.

We will follow the general timeline suggested by William Parsons in his examination of the psychological-comparativist dialogue. Parsons divides the history of the field into three stages, 1880-1944, 1944-1970, and 1970-2000.⁴⁵ These stages will be heuristically beneficial because many of the social scientists involved in the timeline described by Parsons are either the same thinkers involved in the development of the theory of conversion or responding to the same influences. Additionally, the main focus of this section will be on North American theorists rather than their European counterparts. I do this not only because the birth of American social sciences at the turn of the century initiated the sustained interest in religious conversion but because these theorists are drawing from the same cultural well as Graham and his predecessors, even if they have a different opinion about what they find.

⁴⁵ Parsons, "Themes and Debates in the Psychology-Comparativist Dialogue." pp.229-230.

1880-1944: Early conversion theorists.

The founder of American psychology, G. Stanley Hall, blazed the trail for psychological theories of religion. Hall was born in 1844 in Ashfield, Massachusetts, which was, as historian George Marsden put it, “the heartland in which Edwardsean orthodoxy had left its deepest mark.”⁴⁶ Hall’s education took a circuitous route due to his humble origins and lack of funding. Instead of doing his graduate work in Germany, which would have been the established course in his days, Hall went to Union Theological Seminary with the idea of a religious vocation.⁴⁷ Though Union was at the time a squarely orthodox evangelical institution, Hall managed to be sufficiently heterodox to prompt the university president to “kneel and pray for his soul” following his trial sermon.⁴⁸ After graduating from Union, Hall was able to study in Germany for a short time due to contributions from Henry Ward Beecher and his congregation. In Germany, Hall was not only influenced intellectually by the psychology of Wilhelm Wundt and the positivism of Auguste Comte, he was also struck by the lack of inhibition he found in Bonn and Berlin.⁴⁹ All of the “charms” of German life, including pantheism, agnosticism, materialism, and above all, evolutionism, helped him attain, in his words, “maturity in his religious consciousness.”⁵⁰

Thus we come to what now seems to be a glaring paradox that manifested itself in so much of the work of the early social scientists. Hall believed that his faith

⁴⁶ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*. p.161.

⁴⁷ Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. p.46.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

in empiricism, a biological view of religion, and the observational method were not only in perfect accord with ‘true’ Christian religion, but that those beliefs strengthened and progressed the Christian cause.⁵¹ As Hall describes it: “The new psychology, which brings simply a new method and new standpoint to philosophy, is I believe Christian to its root and center.”⁵² Hall and his equally famous students, James Henry Leuba and Edwin Starbuck, make up the core of what became known as the Clark school of religious psychology; they were part of a generation of scholars who under the competing pressures of Darwinism, new studies in comparative religion, the rise of empirical social sciences as well as the seemingly outdated religion of the fathers and forefathers, strove to find an accord in those influences. Unable or unwilling to completely abandon their religious heritage, these scholars sought to situate the new knowledge claims and methodologies in a more advanced place through the rubric of progressivism. Ironically, the insight attained through their work and the stress they placed on objectivism soon left little room in the burgeoning American university landscape for any religious views that resembled those of the previous generations.⁵³

The tensions caused by this dilemma are reflected in Hall’s work on religious conversions. The most striking theoretical outcome of this tension is the linking of religion and evolution. Hall conformed to a European intellectual tradition following Hegel that linked the individual, the species, and progression in a particular way. By adding Darwinism and his evangelical roots to this mixture, Hall formulated a genetic

⁵¹ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*. p.162.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For a book length account of this transformation, see: Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*.

psychology of religion, in which the religious development of an individual mirrored the religious development of the species.⁵⁴ Hall postulated a normative development in children through adolescence and into adulthood that involved anxiety, sexual frustrations, and eventual resolution in altruistic behavior. This development was mirrored in the individual's religious development. The years of preadolescence are ones of hero worship and extraversion and therefore emphasis should be placed on the Old Testament stories of law and order and heroic deeds.⁵⁵ As the child continues to develop, he will undergo a conversion of sorts in which Jesus' central teachings will be recognized, and the child will turn from egotism to altruism. The same is true for the human race at large. Hall understood religion as evolutionary meaning that to him different races and nations are in the process of evolving towards true Christianity. Comparing the way that children mature to the way that civilizations change, Hall states: "Complex as the process is, a pivotal point is somehow discernible where the *ego* yields to the *alter*. Normal and imperceptible as this evolution is ideally, the transition is in fact the chief antithesis in all the human cosmos."⁵⁶

Of even more import to the legacy of psychology of religion, Hall is famous for his biological approach to religion. Hall was an early champion of objective observation, which we will contrast with William James' introspectionism; this

⁵⁴ Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. p.50. This line of thinking was certainly 'in the air' during the turn of the century. Freud famously took up a similar line of thought, though he substituted enlightened rationalism for true Christianity has the end goal of progressive revolution.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.51.

⁵⁶ Hall, *Adolescence; Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*.

reliance on observation led Hall to link religion to physiological processes due to the correlation between physical and sexual maturation during adolescence and the high occurrence of religious conversions at that time.⁵⁷ Beyond a simple correlation in occurrences, Hall saw a relationship between the intimacies of religious belief and physical sexuality, though he never systematically drew the conclusions of that relationship as Freud or later psychologists of religion did.⁵⁸ Though Hall would not have agreed with the logical ramifications that his successors would draw from his theories, he began a trend of reducing religious belief to observable and physical processes.

Hall's two most influential students were Edwin Starbuck and James Henry Leuba. In each scholar's work, the advancement of objectivism pushed the religious claims further.⁵⁹ Though neither could be called a materialist in the modern sense, both moved toward that designation. Starbuck is best known for his extensive use of questionnaires to gain insight into the processes of religious conversion. From these questionnaires Starbuck concluded, much as Hall did, that religious conversion was part of a normal evolutionary track that was both individual and species wide. He expanded on Hall's theories by noting the stages of anxiety, guilt, and then release before and after the conversion experience. Starbuck explicitly linked evolution and pre-conversion stress, stating: "The prevalence of religious doubt and storm and stress seems to be the result of natural selection."⁶⁰ Starbuck also concluded that there were

⁵⁷ Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. p.42.

⁵⁸ Hall, *Adolescence; Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*. pp.295-301.

⁵⁹ Wulff, "A Century of Conversion in American Psychology of Religion." pp.43-45.

⁶⁰ Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*. p.399.

two types of conversion, a normal, healthy one and a sick or sinful one. James later famously drew upon Starbuck's notion of a sickly conversion, calling it "sick soul."⁶¹ Additionally, James relied heavily on Starbuck's questionnaires and their results, although James' method and conclusions varied widely from those of the Clark school. Starbuck, like Hall, maintained the belief that religion and science were in perfect accord, and saw Christianity in pedagogical terms—in the ways that it helps to advance both the individual and the species.⁶² Leuba, more than Hall or Starbuck, moved away from the view of religious pedagogy and even from the belief in a transcendent object.⁶³ Though he too saw in humanity a trend towards goodness, it is in Leuba's work that the reductive explanation of religious phenomena begins to flower and drop its transcendent core.⁶⁴ The progression of Hall-Starbuck-Leuba set in motion a trend in the psychology of religion that is alive and well today. In its essence, this trend represents a methodology that is reductive, that is, it understands religious belief and action to be the product of some other bodily or social element that can be explained in those terms, and it is philosophically materialist and positivistic in the sense that it dismisses claims that cannot be grounded in observable, empirically grounded ways. Although these are generalizations and not universally applicable to any scholar or school of scholarship, the trend has marked the psychology of religion since the turn of the century.

As these materialist philosophical roots were taking hold, a different lineage was preparing to bloom. The work of William James in *The Varieties of Religious*

⁶¹ Wulff, "A Century of Conversion in American Psychology of Religion." p.45.

⁶² Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. p.10.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.11.

Experience marks a departure from the methodologies and philosophy of the Clark school of psychology of religion. Even if, as David Wulff has suggested, *The Varieties* is primarily a defense of the religious outlook, it is also a great many other things.⁶⁵ James' work is bursting with descriptive accounts, forays into comparative religion (albeit at times naïve and mishandled), deep introspection, and philosophical wanderings, and yet there is little evidence of an overarching theory. This absence allowed James to be all things to all people (both good and bad) and it has also made it difficult to adequately situate James within one school of thought or another.

The aspect of James' work that we will use as illustration is the way in which he understood the relationship between religious experience and its possible biological determinants, or reductionism. One of the goals of *The Varieties* was to discredit the conclusions of medical materialism. James understood medical materialism to be an overly simplistic group of theories because he considered the reduction of religious phenomena to bodily functions to be a refutation of the religious experience. James describes it in his typical fashion:

Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It snuffs out Saint Teresa as an hysteric, Saint Francis of Assisi as an hereditary degenerate. George Fox's discontent with the shams of his age, and his pining for spiritual veracity, it treats as a symptom of a disordered colon.⁶⁶

James does not discredit the link between religious experience and organic systems, rather he asserts that this linking downgrades the value of the religious experience and rules out the possibility of something 'more' going on. One of the ways that

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.477.

⁶⁶ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. p.14.

James negotiated this discrepancy was to distinguish between what he called existential and spiritual judgments. The former were concerned with the how and the why of religion, i.e., the biological basis of religion, while spiritual judgments were qualitative feelings or attributes that individuals experienced during a religious episode.

The spiritual judgments observed by James in *The Varieties* led him to postulate that there was something more than biological processes occurring. James was hesitant to give systematic treatment to what this ‘more’ might be, but he was convinced of its power and importance. An illustrative quote that shows the extent to which James would describe the ‘more’ reads: “Let me then propose, as an hypothesis, that whatever it may be on its *farther* side, the “more” with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its *hither* side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life.”⁶⁷ What can be spoken of on the ‘hither’ or human side James expressed using the spatial metaphor of the subconscious, or at other times the language of the subliminal following Fredric Meyers.⁶⁸ This subconscious realm of consciousness, central to James’ understanding of religious experience, allowed James to connect the reductive tendencies of other psychologists of religion within a realm of metaphysics, thereby creating a space for a science of religion that could use reductive methods without totally discrediting the religious experience.

What this philosophical position meant for James’ theory of conversion was a subtle shift from the conclusions of the psychologists of the Clark school. James, following Starbuck, saw two types of temperament that were reflected in the

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.502.

⁶⁸ Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. p.489.

conversion experience; James called them healthy-minded and sick soul.⁶⁹ James drew on the work of Starbuck and his questionnaires heavily, citing them by name enough times to average a citation every sixth page.⁷⁰ And yet James' work is qualitatively different from Starbuck's or the other scholars of the Clark school. Whereas the Clark school's method was to cast as wide a net as possible in order to make conclusions on the nature of conversion, James focused on individual experiences, descriptive accounts, and usually religious 'geniuses'—innovators, highly skilled practitioners, or leaders. The result of these differences is that conversion of those of the sick soul variety results in a momentous second birth, usually one that occurs instantaneously as opposed to gradually, that brings glorious insights and assurances of a new world.⁷¹

James was very much a child of his time; he used evolutionary models in his understanding of religious progression—with a type of Protestantism as the peak—and he was no stranger to orientalist positions. Yet he still occupies a pivotal place in the history of the social sciences and religious studies because he attempted to meld the scientific study of religion and the metaphysical assumption that there was something more than biological processes at work occurring in religious experiences. Granted he did this from a particular Protestant vantage point—how could he not—but the result was a scholarly position, which allowed what Jeffrey Kripal called, “radical open-mindedness that refuses to ignore anomalous psychological events.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Wulff, “A Century of Conversion in American Psychology of Religion.” p.45.

⁷⁰ White, “A Measured Faith: Edwin Starbuck, William James, and the Scientific Reform of Religious Experience.” p.432.

⁷¹ Wulff, “A Century of Conversion in American Psychology of Religion.” p.45.

⁷² Kripal, *The Serpent's Gift*. p.128.

And, though both the Clark school and James saw the possibility of religion being adaptive or progressive, James' view of religious phenomena aiding in overcoming conscious (and unconscious) problems was far more influential than the heuristic model of the Clark school.

1944-1970: Rising psychoanalytic approaches

Interest in conversion studies died down during the interwar period, partly because of the rise of behaviorism in the laboratory and psychoanalysis in the clinical setting, and partly because of a decline in the interest in religion as a subject both academically and in popular culture.⁷³ This trend shifted in the 1950s with the decline of interest in behaviorism, rekindling the interest in subjective experiences, and heralding a rise in the interest in religious questions on all cultural fronts. Divergent psychiatric, sociological, and psychoanalytic approaches to the subject of religious conversion emerged during this time.

Although these approaches were marked by differing stances on reductionism, the psychological theories of conversion were largely unified (in the U.S.) in their emphasis on ego psychology. This shift in psychoanalytic theory has its own complicated history, with all the fractured theories that one might expect of the heirs to Freud's mantle, but it is helpful to point out some important details about this shift that explain both the novel takes on conversion and the ethos of the time. Put simply, ego psychology is a shift in psychoanalytic thought that puts more emphasis on the ego (that is the self, the arbiter between the outside world and the unconscious) than

⁷³ Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. p.31.

on instinct theory, or the vicissitudes of the unconscious (the id). What this meant in a philosophical sense was the empowerment of the conscious rational self over the unconscious realm. What it meant for the theory of conversion, along with broader theoretical concerns, was a shift in focus in the nature of identity.

Erik Erikson became the leading figure in the ego psychology school of psychoanalysis.⁷⁴ During the 1950s and 60s, Erikson established himself as the most influential psychoanalytic theorist since Freud, and helped shift the general conception of psychoanalytic thought towards religion. Considering Erikson's upbringing it is perhaps not surprising that he made identity the focus his life's work. Even the case of his last name is illustrative. Erikson was born Erik Salomonsen in 1902, the last name of the man to whom his mother was married even though he was conceived months after she had left him. Erikson knew little about his biological father except that he was a Danish gentile, while his mother and family were Jewish. Following his mother's marriage to his pediatrician, Erikson's last name was changed from Salomonsen to Homburger. During his childhood the truth of his biological father was withheld from him, although his physical differences were apparent. When Erikson was naturalized in the U.S. in 1939, he took the name Erik Homburger Erikson, in essence adopting his Jewishness, Nordic heritage and his stepfather's name, while becoming the son of himself.⁷⁵ He became Erik son of Erik.

⁷⁴ So much so that Erikson actually transcends the confines of that school, becoming something of a bridge to the next school of psychoanalytic thought, object-relations. For more see: Friedman, *Identity's Architect*; Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. pp.369-410.

⁷⁵ Friedman, *Identity's Architect*. pp.144-147.

Though Erikson did not systematically theorize on conversion, it was central to most of his writings on religion. This is illustrated in Erikson's influential principle of epigenesis, which suggested that the psychological growth of an individual proceeds in a similar way to the development of fetal organs - each developmental step must happen in its own time and subsequent steps build upon previous ones.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Erikson's principle of epigenesis was a break from traditional psychoanalytic developmental theory that confined itself to the psychological development of childhood; Erikson saw psychological growth as a lifelong process. Built into this view of development, Erikson postulated predetermined crises that had to be overcome to 'advance' or continue development; it is within these crises that his theory of religious conversion takes place.

These theories took shape in Erikson's psycho-historical works on religious figures: Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi's Truth*, Jesus, "Galilean sayings and the sense of the I" and Martin Luther, *Young Man Luther*. The common, interrelated themes throughout these three works are the question of what makes a religious genius, how the life cycle and life stages play a role in that development, and the interaction between the religious genius, culture, and society. Erikson sought to understand how the development of a creative religious figure is influenced by culture, that is by parents, symbol systems, and religious beliefs, how he navigates the development of his identity vis-à-vis these cultural forces, and finally how he creatively turns those

⁷⁶ Wulff, *Psychology of Religion*. p.371.

forces into novel religious ideas and ideals that in turn affect the culture that he grew out of.⁷⁷

An important quote from *Young Man Luther* will help guide the way in which Erikson will be helpful for understanding conversion and the tensions of reductionism:

Now and again, however, the individual is called upon (called by *whom*, only the theologians claim to know, and by *what* only bad psychologists) to lift his individual patienthood to the level of a universal one and try to solve for all what he could not solve for himself alone.⁷⁸

The individual referenced here is Erikson's religious genius, or homo religiosus. Erikson describes the act of religious creativity as the ability to "lift" his "individual patienthood to the level of a universal one." At first glance (and possible at the second, third, and all subsequent glances, depending on your outlook), this may sound strikingly similar to equating religiosity to pathology, thus following Freud's infamous declaration, but there are important differences.⁷⁹ If nothing else, the parenthetical qualifier helps to elucidate that Erikson is not engaging universally reductive thinking. Beyond that, Erikson is positing that these special few can take their cultural and development baggage and process that baggage adaptively such that the symbols they produce can therapeutically help the broader culture that is affected by this baggage writ large.

⁷⁷ I use the masculine pronoun here because all of the religious figures that Erikson discusses are male.

⁷⁸ Erikson, *Young Man Luther*. p.67.

⁷⁹ "Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity." Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*. p.43.

Erikson's religious genius is a figure who through the resolution of his own developmental identity crisis helps to resolve the larger cultural crisis that mirrors his own. This adaptive approach does not rule out the developmental or even pathological origins of religious ideology but similarly it refrains from biological universalism that precludes other metaphysical sources.

Though few true believers would have been pleased with Erikson's approach to religion, it is far more accepting than much of the work focusing on religion and religious conversion. There was a resurgent interest in religious conversion among psychiatrists and analysts during the mid-50s and 60s.⁸⁰ Many of the resulting studies owed much to the Clark school's methodology, namely using case studies and questionnaires to make generalized claims; chief among these studies is the work of Carl Christensen and Leon Salzman. Even with their methodological lineage to the Clark school, David Wulf notes that these researchers followed the trend of ego psychology in that they "viewed the traditional conflict and struggle [of the conversion experience] in terms of the dynamics of the ego."⁸¹

Christensen's definition of religious conversion provides an example of the tone and general philosophy of these studies.

The religious conversion experience is defined as an acute hallucinatory episode occurring within the framework of religious belief and characterized by its subjective intensity, apparent suddenness of onset, brief duration, auditory and, sometimes, visual hallucinations, and an observable change in the subsequent behavior of the convert.⁸²

⁸⁰ Wulff, "A Century of Conversion in American Psychology of Religion." p.48.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Christensen, "Religious Conversion." p.207.

The most striking aspect of this definition is its use of pathological language to describe the conversion event, thus implying that it is unhealthy or not normal. Also noteworthy is that the definition restricts itself to quick, sudden conversion *events*, as opposed to a long drawn out conversion experience. Likewise, it presupposes a psychological response to the event (even if Christensen believes those responses to be pathological), meaning that an event lacking those responses is not properly a conversion experience. We should be wary here and recognize just how perfectly Christensen's definition fits with the normative prototype of evangelical conversion narrative at the time. Christensen is theorizing about one kind of conversion narrative, a Protestant one, and he is accepting at face value the claims of the narrative by normalizing its factors into a medical definition.

Despite Christensen's reification of Protestant norms in his definition (indeed, the same claim can and has been made about all of the theorists discussed above), what is important to note here is the way in which religion is described in terms of both reductionism and pathology. Not only is the experience shorn of any of its theological baggage, or even the possibility of the validity of that type of explanation, the experience itself is viewed as unhealthy. Christensen, Salzman, and other like-minded scholars in the mid-50s, were not the first to pathologize religious belief, indeed the psychoanalysts of this time remained more loyal to the thoughts of Freud than to Erikson and his followers.⁸³ What I am suggesting is that the social scientists of the 1950s came directly from the Clark school's lineage, and that they moved away

⁸³ See: Freud, "A Religious Experience."

from reliance on religious pedagogy and pushed the philosophy of reductionism to the point of devaluing religious belief into pathology.

1970-Present: A coalition of social sciences

The scholarly reaction to the counterculture movement of the 1960s was mixed. Not only were studies done on the movement but the movement influenced the ways in which studies were done. For example, sociologists examined the conversion of youths to cults (or new religious movements as they are more aptly called now) and they began to question their own long held assumptions on the secularization of modern culture.⁸⁴ This duality spread across the social sciences in different ways and at different speeds but in general the effect has been to strengthen the two existing schools of thought in regard to reductionism. The academy has produced a myriad of work that attempts to take seriously James' concept of the 'more' while at the same time looking critically at religious experiences, whereas the medical sciences—such as neurology and cognitive science—have provided novel and more sophisticated tools for reducing cultural phenomena to purely biological functions.

In addition to the two recurrent poles of the reductive spectrum, we need to acknowledge a third option in the study of conversion: the descriptive. This third alternative, which has been present to a greater or lesser extent throughout the history of the field, developed into a vital force in recent years. Influenced especially by Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology with its insistence on 'thick description' and

⁸⁴ This conversation has been ongoing in Sociology, See for example: Berger, "Secularism in Retreat"; Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority."

implied functionalism, the descriptive tradition attempted to become a neutral middleman in the fight over reductionism.⁸⁵ Of course, such neutrality is impossible, as Talal Asad pointed out quickly and damningly in Geertz's case.⁸⁶ Even descriptive work requires a definition implicit or explicit of the object in question and every definition is to some extent normative.

And yet the descriptive tradition has produced some very good work on conversion by scholars aware and attuned to Asad's post-colonial, post-modern critique, the most well known amongst them is by Lewis Rambo. Rambo's chief accomplishment has been to create a structural model to describe the process of conversion. He attempts to take into account the great variety of influences, structures, and outcomes that can be involved in conversions. Additionally, he moves away from conceptualizing conversion as an instantaneous or quick change (although he acknowledges that it is possible) in order to focus on the extended, protracted process.⁸⁷ Rambo's stages of conversion are: Context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. Though he understands these stages as sequential, he makes clear that they are far from universal or invariant.⁸⁸ Instead, his goal is to present a "heuristic construction designed to integrate the perspectives of anthropology, psychology, sociology, and religious studies."⁸⁹ At the same time

⁸⁵ See: Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures : Selected Essays*.

⁸⁶ Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz."

⁸⁷ See: Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p.165.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Rambo is in tune with theological perspectives, which he incorporates into his work.⁹⁰ This openness makes his contribution to the field of conversion studies invaluable.

The last examples of opposing ends of the reductive spectrum that we will discuss are reflective of the current state of the social sciences in religious studies. There is a push to bring evolutionary psychology, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience into the field in an effort to replace old approaches to religion with “testable explanatory techniques.”⁹¹ There is also a resurgence of the comparative project reminiscent of scholars such as James, who through the use of social scientific theories seek to deconstruct and compare religious phenomena without reducing them simply to biology or pathology.

Two good examples of the advances in reductive techniques are Scott Atran’s *In God’s We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* and Todd Tremlin’s *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion*. Both authors use cognitive theories to explain religion and religious belief, and both aim for predictive methodologies and empirically verifiable results. They also tend to deny the complexity of religious phenomena in favor of basic underlying features; instead of embracing the massive variety of forms of religious practice or the social, cultural, and individual influences on them, many of these authors assert the universality of religious beliefs and practices. Tremlin states: “It turns out that thinking about gods,

⁹⁰ Rambo’s openness to theological perspectives is clear throughout his work, but it is also made clear by his position as the long time editor of the journal, *Pastoral Psychology*.

⁹¹ Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*. p. ix.

while requiring the complete brain system, actually pivots on just a handful of quite ordinary mental tools that are present at birth and mature in the first years of life.”⁹²

Both Tremlin and Atran situate conversion under broader schema and explain it through cognitive models. Tremlin situates conversion under the broader category of religious change and hypothesizes that once a public religious system becomes too distant from its cognitive framework, new religious actors and systems will develop to take its place.⁹³ This hypothesis rests on Tremlin’s extreme functionalist approach, in which he understands people to use religion for practical rather than intellectual purposes. Once religion does not adequately conform to “natural cognitive biases” the system changes.⁹⁴ Atran, on the other hand, focuses more on how evolutionary theories affect individual cognition, and he frames his hypothesis of conversion in terms of cognitive dissonance, stress, and anxiety.⁹⁵ Atran’s theories strive to be predictive so his focus dwells on cognitive anxiety tests, models of self, and models of others in order to calculate who is likely to convert and the effect of conversion. His conclusion: “In brief, *linked feelings of guilt, anxiety, and social alienation are often conspicuous factors in religious possession, conversion, and mystical experience.*”⁹⁶

Taken together as illustrative of the extreme side of the reductive spectrum in the current social sciences, Atran and Tremlin represent a totalistic explanation of religious beliefs and phenomena. This stance aligns them with the early founders of

⁹² Ibid. p.75.

⁹³ Ibid. p.184.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Atran, *In Gods We Trust*. p.167.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.168. (Emphasis in the original).

the Clark school, who believed deeply in Protestant ideology yet were equally assured of the eventual totalistic explanation that scientific theory of religion would offer. The contemporary authors of this position, now completely divorced from the Christian position, answer any attempt to question the totality of their project with the accusation crypto-theology.

As we have seen, there is another way of understanding religion through the social sciences. A good example of a contemporary scholar who represents the other side of the reductive spectrum is Sudhir Kakar. Kakar, born in pre-partition India and trained in Western schools of social sciences, has made a career of examining Eastern religions without recourse to pathology or pure biology. As Parsons phrases it, he has developed “a theoretical basis for adjudicating between psychoanalytic universalism and cultural relativity.”⁹⁷

In his work, *The Inner World: a Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, Kakar seeks to understand Indian cultural and religious traditions through the lens of individual developmental patterns. He uses a variety of psychoanalytic theories, from classic Freudian Oedipal theory to a modified life-cycle theory via Erikson to Heinz Kohut’s theory of narcissism, which we will discuss in depth in chapter two. The result is an explanatory framework that facilitates a deeper understanding of cultural phenomena while leaving open both the great variety of experience and the possibility of the Jamesian “more.” Kakar theorizes on the individual, culture, and religion using psychological theories without reducing the phenomena or experiences to pure biology or pathology.

⁹⁷ Parsons, “Themes and Debates in the Psychology-Comparativist Dialogue.” p.245.

One of the developmental steps that Kakar identifies is the entry into society that occurs in Indian boys after an extended period of maternal closeness. Kakar names this step “the second birth.”⁹⁸ As well as bearing a striking resemblance to the Protestant terminology for conversion, this developmental step mirrors the process in other ways as well. Though this step is different in that it is a childhood experience, it is similar in the way that the individual experiences a major shift in whom they understand authority and affection to be coming from. Kakar explains the outcome of this shift in terms of Kohut’s theory of narcissism, particularly two configurations called the grandiose self and the idealized parental imago.⁹⁹ Essential to our purposes here is that Kakar uses social sciences to understand a developmental moment and then explains a larger cultural trait and subsequent religious beliefs through that lens.

What we have seen through this brief genealogy is the birth and use of two poles of understanding religion through the lens of the social sciences. On the one hand, religious phenomena are reduced to their purely biological origin in a way that explains the phenomena completely, i.e., leaving no room for alternative or complementary explanations. Additionally, this sort of explanation on the extreme end of the reductive spectrum is inclined to understand religion as pathological thereby assuming a secular norm.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, we have seen a long lineage of scholars who attempt to balance social scientific theories of religion by both allowing alternative narratives and explanations a place within their theories and

⁹⁸ Kakar, *The Inner World*. p.126.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p.129.

¹⁰⁰ This is particularly true after the 1920s, when the fundamentalist split from mainstream Protestantism pushed scholars even further in their belief that religion was slowly fading and secularization was an inevitable outcome.

attempting to withhold normative qualitative judgments. If the post-modern shift has taught us anything, it is that this move is impossible to achieve completely, that there is no totally objective way to theorize. Even still, there are scholars, as we have seen, who acknowledge that impossibility and attempt to understand where their own theories are coming from in order to better understand the religious phenomena they encounter. Jeffrey Kripal has termed this type of understanding of religion as a ‘both/and’ approach; the biological origin of the religious phenomenon can never be divorced from it but also can never fully explain it either.¹⁰¹

The both/and approach does not demand a particular sort of metaphysics that proposes something more than our observable slice of reality. For me, it simply means that one doesn’t assume either a total lack of metaphysical reality or its presence when investigating religious claims. To be clear, the social sciences’ methodological bedrock of reductionism, comparison, even ethnography evolves proposing an explanation for religious belief different from what the religious adherent claims. My assertion here is that scholarship is more complete when one does not assume that there is any explanation of theory of religion that explains it in its totality.

¹⁰¹ See: Kripal et al., *Comparing Religions*. Especially chapter 12

Chapter 2

Forest Home, Doubt, and Certainty

In the closing days of August 1949, Billy Graham attended a small Christian conference at Forest Home, a resort tucked away in the San Bernardino Mountains. The conference—hosted by Henrietta Mears, a maternal figure and an under-recognized influence on Graham, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade, and Jim Rayburn of Young Life—featured Graham and a number of his colleagues. The conference was challenging for Graham: many of the attendees were better educated than he was, and the previous months had proved both relatively unsuccessful and thought-provoking.

The message of Forest Home can be characterized as an ethos that is definitional for Graham. It combines beliefs, aspirations, desires, and anxieties in a narrative form to express to the reader or listener its overdetermined message. The Billy Graham ethos, which would become the central tenet of evangelicalism in the U.S. and reshape the religious landscape domestically and abroad, revolves around the decision that Graham made that night at Forest Home—to set aside his intellectual doubts and accept the Divine authorship of the Bible with all the attendant consequences. Assurance and doubt represent twinned concepts within this symbolism, occurring at different ends of a qualitative spectrum; assurance is the best, most holy while doubt signifies distance from God. The goal of this chapter, my story, is to examine the ways in which Graham's narrative can be understood in psycho-social terms that illuminate why it has become so powerful and, more

important, why it has become central to the evangelical movement in the post-war era and American culture at large.

The narrative is relatively simple, and were it not for its central importance to the hagiography of Billy Graham, it is doubtful that it would have been documented. Graham arrives at the conference after an unsuccessful crusade in Pennsylvania with fresh doubts concerning his ability and chosen career. During his stay, Graham is privy to a conversation that he does not understand but feels he should—a conversation concerning higher criticism and the translation of the New Testament from the Greek.¹⁰² In addition, Graham is (or maybe is not) insulted by a close friend because of his views on the authority and the inerrancy of Scripture. This prompts Graham's soul-searching walk through the moonlit forest, where with tear-soaked face he commits to never again question the veracity of his belief in the Scripture. A scant few months later Graham is a resounding success in Los Angeles and is catapulted into the national spotlight.

Such is the third of Graham's conversion stories, the first as a teen walking down the sawdust trail at a Mordecai Ham tent-revival, and the second occurring on the 18th green of Temple Terrace Golf and Community Club. Although one of three, the Forest Home story bears special importance in both Graham's own telling of his life story and others' accounts of it.¹⁰³ More than the other two, this conversion narrative is symbolic of an ethos that Graham would make popular by expressing it to

¹⁰² Frady, *Billy Graham, a Parable of American Righteousness*. p.183.

¹⁰³ It's fair to call them conversion stories, yet it is also fair to say that Graham needed no conversion story—he was already there. For example, at Graham's first conversion in the tent of Ham, he marked 'recommitment' on his conversion card. See Wacker, *America's Pastor*. p.42.

more people face to face than anyone had done previously (with the possible exception of Pope John Paul II) and to countless more via alternative media such as T.V., radio, and movies.¹⁰⁴

The Forest Home narrative is pivotal for understanding Graham's ministry. The narrative emerges primarily out of the lessons he learns from encounters with his foil, Chuck Templeton, and represents a kind of second conversion story for Graham, one that defies the conventions of the standard conversion narrative arch. The event takes place after Graham has given his heart to Jesus, which happens in his first conversion, after his providential decision to become a professional evangelist on the 18th green of a Florida golf course, but before he bursts into the national spotlight. In fact, the story culminates just months before Graham's first major national success along with the flood of media attention, the 1949 Los Angeles 'Canvas Cathedral' crusade. Its proximity temporally as well as spatially (the climax happens in the mountains outside of L.A.) denotes its importance to Graham's central message. Indeed, the lesson Graham learns from this episode becomes the keystone to his entire ministry: assurance in the face of doubt.

Graham's conversion at Forest Home is not a story of a nonbeliever becoming a believer. It is a story about how a believer came to know, *know*, what to believe. Beyond that, the Forest Home narrative is the vehicle that Graham employs to inform his listeners what belief really is. As so many critics and admirers of Graham have pointed out, the content of Graham's theology was thin at best. This story helps Graham demonstrate that it is the way in which one believes that is important, over

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.21.

and sometimes against what is actually believed. Like all publicly uttered conversion narratives, it has a function, namely didacticism, and it follows a pre-established form, the lineage of which we traced in the previous chapter. What makes this story singular is its content, historical moment, and effect. Of all of Graham's moralism and teachings, the message at the center of his Forest Home story is central not only to his own thinking but also for evangelicalism in America.

The importance of conversion to Graham's mission is difficult to overstate. Graham's crusades were expertly geared towards producing 'decisions for Christ'; the metaphor historians and participants use most is: like a well-oiled machine. Everything in his ministry, his books, movies, and television spots, his crusades, charities, and foreign trips was designed to lead to the conversion moment. Conversion is the implied goal of the term evangelize, that is, to bring the word of God to the ignorant so that they may turn Christ, i.e., experience conversion. Graham's genius lay in his ability to subvert any obstacle - theological, physical, or monitor - that might stand in the way of this outcome.

This chapter will explore the ways in which the Forest Home narrative, so central to the Graham story, harnesses and taps into deep motivation in the process of being a cultural symbol; in other words, the ways in which the Graham narrative connects with the unconscious anxieties of its audience.¹⁰⁵ Doing so will provide a template for investigating other aspects of Graham's story and the ways they affected and mirrored the deep motivations of people in the 1940s and 50s. Using the work of multiple theorists from different historical and theoretical backgrounds, I will

¹⁰⁵ Both of these terms, deep motivation and cultural symbol, are drawn from Obeyesekere and their meaning will be discussed in greater detail.

interpret the Graham narrative through the lenses of deep motivation and cultural symbol. Such an interpretation will aid in understanding the effectiveness of Billy Graham's message as well as the resurgence of evangelicalism in the 1940s and 50s. To accomplish this task, I will outline the Graham narrative and its variations in more detail, contextualizing them both historically and thematically, before turning to the psychoanalytic theories that will help decrypt them.

Graham in the Woods

The story of Graham's decision in the woods begins a number of years before his late night stroll. In the mid-1940s Billy Graham was considered as one of the up-and-coming stars in the evangelical and fundamentalist world. I do not use these two descriptors interchangeably; by fundamentalist I am referring to conservative Protestant Christians of the 40s and 50s who saw themselves as defending the essence of Christianity from the onslaught of modernity, and by evangelical, I am referring to a conservatives who adhered to nearly identical orthodoxy but were less concerned with protecting it from contamination and more concerned with spreading its message. These two terms are tricky because the meaning of each changes throughout Graham's career, indeed because of Graham's career.

Graham was not the only rising star. Charles, Chuck, Templeton was a fellow itinerant evangelist working for Youth for Christ (YFC) during the 1940s who met Graham in 1945. During the mid-40s, YFC, the surprisingly popular brainchild of Torrey Johnson, brought fundamentalist doctrine to youths around the country through vaudevillian showmanship. Its mottoes were, "Old-fashioned Truth for the

Up-to-date Youth” and “Geared to the Times, but Anchored to the Rock” and its success was one of the earliest indicators of religious revival.¹⁰⁶ Most accounts of the Graham narrative, including his own, are quick to mention that Templeton was largely considered the better of the two in terms of preaching and exegesis, and yet Templeton was hamstrung by nagging theological questions.¹⁰⁷ Templeton resigned from YFC and from a successful pastorate to attend Princeton Theological Seminary in the fall of 1948 and immediately began to find some of the answers he sought. He went to Graham not long after he began at Princeton and said to him: “Bill, we are getting by on animal magnetism and youthful enthusiasm and natural talent, but that’s not going to work when we’re forty or fifty. You’ve got to come with me.”¹⁰⁸

Most accounts assert that Graham truly entertained the idea, and the story in William Martin’s *A Prophet with Honor*, one of the best and most objective accounts of Graham’s career, says that Graham countered with a proposal of them both going to Oxford to study.¹⁰⁹ Templeton’s offer marks the beginning of Graham’s period of doubt, wherein the two have a number of “disturbing conversations,” according to Graham, that raise serious questions on the authority of Scripture and Graham’s method of preaching.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.93.

¹⁰⁷ See: Graham, *Just as I Am*; Wacker, *America’s Pastor*; Frady, *Billy Graham, a Parable of American Righteousness*; Pollock, *Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography*.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.110.

¹⁰⁹ Graham apparently believed that it would be too embarrassing for him to attend a school in the U.S. because he was currently serving as the president of a fundamentalist Bible-college.

¹¹⁰ Graham, *Just as I Am*. p.136.

One of the last of these conversations occurred in New York a short time before the conference at Forest Home. With Templeton fresh out of his first year at Princeton, the two met several times in a small hotel room close to Times Square. The tone of the different narratives makes the rendezvous seem almost illicit. Martin describes the scene as: "...long bouts of prayer and discussion in which he [Graham] struggled to defend received belief against the attacks Templeton mounted with his newly acquired weapons from the seminarian's armamentarium."¹¹¹ Frady describes the tension: "Contending together over the literal verity of the Bible and the efficacies of faith and reason, Templeton was as much trying his new skepticisms... against Billy's certitude, as Billy was laboring to affirm and sustain that certitude. The two of them would flounder on with this through the length of a whole day and then on through the night..."¹¹² The conversation ends with dual proclamations. From Graham: "I just know I've found that when I say, *The Bible says!*—God gives me a power, this power, this incredible *power*. So that's why I have made a decision simply not to think about all these other things any more."¹¹³ And, from Templeton: "You really want to know what you've done, Billy? You've committed intellectual suicide—that's what."¹¹⁴

The accounts differ in wording and tone, but the end result is Graham coming away from the meetings confused and anxious about his beliefs. This anxiety is doubled by an unsuccessful crusade in Altoona, PA, leaving Graham a nail-biting

¹¹¹ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.93.

¹¹² Frady, *Billy Graham, a Parable of American Righteousness*. p.180.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p. 181.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* p.182.

mess leading up to his largest crusade attempt to date, in Los Angeles. Graham describes the feeling:

The disturbing conversations with Chuck Templeton, my confused reaction to studying influential and sometimes contradictory theologians, the quandary over a career in education versus a ministry in evangelism, and most recently the fiasco in Altoona—all these were intellectual, spiritual, and emotional baggage I was carrying in the summer of 1949.¹¹⁵

The event at Forest Home that spurred Graham's midnight walk in the wilderness is somewhat garbled. Graham admits that he felt intimidated by some of the intellectual leaders and conversations at the Forest Home conference.¹¹⁶ What seems to be the precursor to Graham's breakthrough is a comment Templeton made about him. In Graham's account, he says his friend Bob Evans overheard Templeton say: "Poor Billy, I feel sorry for him. He and I are taking two different paths."¹¹⁷ This quote apparently hurts Graham so much that it causes him to take to the woods, although Graham admits that right before relaying that hurtful message, Templeton said to him directly that he was, "fifty years out of date."¹¹⁸ Pollock's account asserts that Templeton believed that Evans misquoted him by telling Graham that he had said: "Poor Billy. If he goes on the way he's going he'll never doing anything for God. He'll be circumscribed to a small little narrow interpretation of the Bible, and

¹¹⁵ Graham, *Just as I Am*. pp.136-137. Graham describes the crusade in Altoona as a "flop." The churches were divided on fundamentalist/ liberal lines, there was a mentally disabled woman in the choir who disrupted the service to the extent that Graham's associates ejected her, and attendance was scarce.

¹¹⁶ Graham, *Just as I Am*. p.137.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.138.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*.

his ministry will be curtailed. As for me, I'm taking a different road."¹¹⁹ Another account (of the ones that try to pin down a direct precursor) does not mention Templeton's comment directly, but declares that Graham was visibly unsettled by a conversation between Templeton and other visiting professors concerning higher criticism. This account, Frady's, reports that Graham says a friend led him out of the room saying: "Billy, I can see that you're disturbed by what those fellows have been talking about, but don't you worry about it, don't you mind them—you just go on as you've been going."¹²⁰

Graham had reached his breaking point. He left his friends and colleagues behind and took his Bible with him out into the moonlit woods.¹²¹ In the glimmering light, Graham knelt by a tree stump, Bible opened, and beseeched the sky. "Oh, God; I cannot prove certain things. I cannot answer some of the questions Chuck is raising and some of the other people are raising, but I accept this Book by faith as the Word of God."¹²² Or, in his more stylized autobiographical account: "O God! There are so many things in this book I do not understand. There are many problems with it for which I have no solution. There are many seeming contradictions. There are some areas in it that do not seem to correlate with modern science. I can't answer some of the philosophical and psychological questions Chuck and others are raising."¹²³ Or, in

¹¹⁹ Pollock, *Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography*. p.53.

¹²⁰ Frady, *Billy Graham, a Parable of American Righteousness*. p.183.

¹²¹ There is some discrepancy in the different accounts as to whether Graham first went out walking then returned for his Bible or just went out straight away with it in hand (see: Pollock, *Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography*. p.53; Graham, *Just as I Am*. p.139.). It is an inconsequential aspect of the story, except for the fact that it betrays the constructed nature of the accounts.

¹²² Pollock, *Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography*. p.53.

¹²³ Graham, *Just as I Am*. p. 139.

an equally stylized but unrecorded interview: “Lord, help me. I don’t have the knowledge. I’m placing myself completely, heart *and* mind, without intellectual reservations, in your hands.”¹²⁴

And so the decision was made. Graham went through the fires of intellectual doubt to emerge assured that he need not concern himself with such doubt again. Even further, if we consider what happened to his foil, Templeton, then to doubt is the path that leads to losing one’s religion.¹²⁵ For Graham, the moment empowered. He told Frady that: “I never wavered from that moment to this. I know that some said I committed intellectual suicide, but I never felt such *power*—such power as after I made that decision.”¹²⁶

Graham’s newfound, or newly re-found, power is the segue in his life story into the 1949 Los Angeles Crusade that launched Graham into the national spotlight. The moral is clear: never doubt the *authority* of the Bible. One can and should learn, but only in the service of better appreciating that authority. Any knowledge that produces uncertainty is suspect. The less doubt one feels, the more powerful the man.

The Ethos of Certainty

Graham’s ethos of certainty was a therapeutic proscription for an era in which the cultural fantasy of bygone social strata was being quickly eroded by social changes. Whether it was through race relations, gender roles, commercialization, or

¹²⁴ Frady, *Billy Graham, a Parable of American Righteousness*. p.183.

¹²⁵ Ironically, Templeton had, by most measures, a very successful career as a journalist and public intellectual in Toronto following his de-conversion. Obviously this is not dwelt upon in the Graham hagiography.

¹²⁶ Frady, *Billy Graham, a Parable of American Righteousness*. p.184. Emphasis in the original.

urbanization, America in the 1950s was changing dramatically. In spite of these changes, or perhaps because of them, white Americans fantasized and fetishized the culture of the 1920s.¹²⁷ Graham's solution was to offer the Bible as the rock to which everything else could be tethered. By accepting one thing as True in an absolute sense, one could sort through the ambiguities of life with ease. Because of the centrality of this point to Graham's ministry, this section will explore the ways in which Graham situated the Bible in American culture.

Understanding Graham's conception of the Bible illuminates his broader worldview. For Graham, what is written in the Bible is secondary to belief in the Bible. This hierarchy has profound repercussions on his social outlook and greatly profited him. On the one hand, Graham could justify his re-alignment out of a strict fundamentalist circle and work with more liberal Christian groups, allowing him to appeal to a broader audience. On the other hand, this position gave Graham the freedom to confidently tell a growing portion of the middle class, white suburbanites, that their anxieties could be cured and the fantasied old way could be restored with one simple step, by accepting Jesus and the authority of the Bible. If pressed, Graham would add that after that defining moment the person must 'grow in Christ,' must study the Bible, and strive for a moral life as defined by Graham. But this second move wasn't really Graham's concern.

In Graham's syndicated advice column founded in 1952, Graham demonstrates this ethos. An inquirer asks Graham: "How can we know what is right

¹²⁷ See: Oakley, *God's Country*. pp.117-119. Oakley frames this fantasy in terms of the most popular television shows of the era, particularly *I Love Lucy* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*.

and what is wrong? There are so many conflicting ideas, and one becomes confused. Is there really any rule to go by?”¹²⁸ This is Graham’s bread and butter: too many truths, too much plurality. Graham is there to simplify, to standardize. Graham begins his response in the same way he frames nearly all of his responses: by saying “the Bible says.” He states: “The Bible says: ‘If any man will do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God.’ I think before one can know what is right and wrong, he must align himself with God. Only then, is he in a position to do right.”¹²⁹ Or, put another way, aligning oneself with God, even if the prescripts of that alignment are unknown, is ipso facto to be morally justified.

Another example of this line of thinking comes from Graham’s bestselling early work, *Peace with God*. Published in 1953 by a popular, non-evangelical press, *Peace with God* presents the essentials of Graham’s ministry, writing dubbed by The Christian Century as “the dullest in a long, long time.”¹³⁰ In the chapter “The Bible,” Graham is both disgusted at the rising antipathy towards the Bible and religion and encouraged by the swell of revival in the country, nearly in the same breath. He says: “And yet—in many homes and among so-called educated people—it has become fashionable to joke about the Bible and to regard it more as a dust catcher than the living Word of God.”¹³¹ In the next paragraph Graham states: “This attitude is changing now, and changing fast! Life is being stripped of its artificialities, its meaningless trimmings...As we cast our frightened eyes around for something that is

¹²⁸ Graham, *My Answer*. p.241.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Quoted in Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.152.

¹³¹ Graham, *Peace with God*. p.25.

real and true and enduring, we are turning once more to this ancient Book...”¹³² He concludes: “This is because the Bible embodies all the knowledge man needs to fill the longing of his soul and solve all his problems.”¹³³

Here we find Graham’s essential message. The world is complex, confusing, and anxiety producing; the answer to this complexity is simplicity. The Bible is not complex when viewed from this prospective; it speaks a clear cohesive message, which Graham can provide. The most important thing is not in the message, it is faith in its authority. In his work, *A Prophet with Honor*, William Martin explained this core tenant of Graham: “His [Graham’s] task, as he had understood it since the day he knelt by the rock at Forest Home, was not to ask hard questions of Scripture but to follow the advice of the old revival hymn, ‘Trust and Obey.’”¹³⁴

In a sermon entitled “The Life That Wins” at Graham’s seminal 1957 New York Crusade, he explicates on Mathew 7:12-14—Jesus’ enunciation of the golden rule in his Sermon on the Mount. After relating the passage, Graham says that he would have liked to have heard that speech because Jesus “spoke as one having authority.”¹³⁵ Graham goes on to say: “You never hear Jesus saying, “I think. I hope. Maybe. I think this is the way to heaven.” Jesus said, “This is the way to heaven.” Jesus said, “I am the way...” There were no ifs, ands or buts about Jesus. He knew. He spoke as one having authority.”¹³⁶ For Graham the first thing that needs emphasizing after introducing the wisdom of do unto others is that Jesus was sure of

¹³² Ibid. pp.25-26.

¹³³ Ibid. p.26.

¹³⁴ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.155.

¹³⁵ Graham, “The Life That Wins.” p.3.

¹³⁶ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

himself. He wasn't a thinker, a critic, or a scholar. No, Jesus was a knower. If you have to think or wonder or if you have doubts, then you are on the wrong path—just as Templeton took the wrong path.

In a similar vein, Graham told his audience on a different date during the same 1957 New York Crusade, that one could and should be assured of one's own salvation. In a sermon entitled "The Marks of a Christian," Graham compares being asked if one is a Christian to being asked if one is married. He asks the audience in Madison Square Garden if when asked if they are married, do they reply: "Well, I hope so. Well, I think so, I'm trying to be married?"¹³⁷ Of course they do not. And Graham tells them that the same should be true when they are asked if they are Christian. He tells them: "A Christian who has received Christ can say with assurance, 'I know that I have eternal life. I'm sure of it.'"¹³⁸

The core message is Graham's acceptance of the authority of the scripture, proscribing him and his followers to obey whatever it purports to say. Questioning what the Bible actually says is akin to not believing in it. Here the suggestion to "Trust and Obey" comes into focus. One is not meant to learn to obey the Bible through a critical reading so as to determine its message. Instead, one is supposed to trust that Graham, and those of his ilk, are espousing the message of the Bible, and to obey the norms and proscriptions that he puts forward.

¹³⁷ Graham, "The Marks of A Christian."p.1.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Creating a cultural symbol

Gananath Obeyesekere's *Medusa's Hair* and *The Work of Culture* explore the relationship between personal history, religious tradition, and therapy. Broadly defined, personal history includes identity, deep motivation, and one's own personal narrative; religious tradition includes myths, religious figures, and rituals; and therapy includes any attempt to alleviate the pains of the former with the symbols of the latter. Deep motivation here means a desire or need at the unconscious level, a need that is inexpressible at the level of consciousness and that articulates itself indirectly. If this sounds like the Freudian schema of the mind and of dream work, one should not be surprised. Obeyesekere compares his project to Freud's in that he interprets culture in broadly the same way that Freud interprets dreams.

Obeyesekere sees the "work of culture" as the process whereby symbolic forms are created and recreated through the minds of individuals within a society.¹³⁹ Symbolic forms both draw upon and are affected by cultural and individual developmental patterns, anxieties, and repressions. Obeyesekere also makes clear that the work of culture occurs not only in the domain of deep motivation; other cultural and historical agents or pressures affect cultural symbols in important ways as well.¹⁴⁰

The goal of this work differs from Obeyesekere's in that we approach cultural symbols from two different directions. Obeyesekere interviews religious participants and describes the ways that their actions and beliefs align or misalign with extant cultural symbols to show the relationship between personal history, culture, symbol, and therapy. Here, we will be looking at the creation of, or the transformation of, an

¹³⁹ Obeyesekere, *The Work of Culture*. p.xix.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

existing, cultural symbol in order to speculate on its function for its believers. In other words, Obeyesekere uses a bottom-up approach to studying culture by looking first at individual actors and then to larger cultural symbols whilst here we will look at the creation of a cultural symbol and examine what it provides for the individual.

Obeyesekere understands culture as pregnant with personal symbols and collective representations; the latter give expression to something bigger than individual development and reflect the nature of the relationship between individual and culture. These symbols, both personal and collective, can produce a historical dialectic, or debate, that yields alternative myth versions that have different relationships to the deep motivations that instigated the original myth.

The work of culture is a creative act, a transformation of developmental dynamics, in line with Freud's notion of working through in therapy. What Obeyesekere describes is a progressive movement of unconscious thought that transforms deep motivation into symbols that seek the resolution of inner conflict. Cultural symbols are therapeutic in the sense that they can provide a basis for self-reflection and connection with others in society. Personal symbols are related through shared cultural symbols, and the extent to which they are communicable allows for the expression of deep motivation in socially acceptable ways.¹⁴¹ The concept of therapy in Obeyesekere and Freud rests upon the slippery spectrum of pathology to normalcy, meaning that all three are relative terms and that there is no such thing as an absolute cure in any symbol or therapeutic technique. In practice, cultural symbols range in effectiveness, and their use never guarantees escape from pathology.

¹⁴¹ Obeyesekere, *The Work of Culture*. p.22.

How then does this view inform our interpretation of Graham's Forest Home narrative? Here we will confine ourselves to looking at the parts of the narrative that point to emotional states that relate to those in Graham's milieu. In doing so, we can glimpse the potential therapeutic possibilities and limitations of the Forest Home narrative as cultural symbol. The narrative movement of the story, when considered as proscriptive, offers a general therapeutic promise; namely, it offers a movement out of particular types of discomfort into the warmth of certainty and security.

The two kinds of discomfort we will focus on here are intellectual insecurity and a breakdown in the societal power structure, or authoritative anxiety. Both of these anxieties were simmering in the cultural climate of the early 1950s. Graham's narrative became so successful because it was able to express those fears and offer comfort or resolution.

Graham's intellectual discomfort is embodied in his foil, Chuck Templeton. The specifics of Graham's challenge are the use of higher criticism to interpret scripture and more generally, the place of specialized education and the shifting social roles of the 1950s. This distress can be applied to both Biblical hermeneutics and contemporary culture. Graham placed himself as the arbiter between the "old time religion" and the new evangelicalism fit for the modern world. The slogan of the Youth for Christ Movement, in which Graham got his early break, was "Geared to the Times, Anchored to the Rock."¹⁴²

The problem of relating Scripture to contemporary situations is not novel, nor is the related problem of keeping authority in *sola scriptura* when a cacophony of

¹⁴² Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.89.

voices is proclaiming different perspectives about the same scripture. Graham had to reestablish a view of scripture that had been publicly ridiculed since the Scopes “Monkey Trial” of the mid-1920s. The Forest Home narrative shows that Graham did so by offering the decision of simple, seemingly observable truths in the face of the discordant multitude of claims offered by experts.¹⁴³

Graham’s story adds to the intellectual discomfort a facet of social disorientation. In the narrative, the item of intellectual scrutiny, the Bible, is supposed also to be the bedrock of moral and spiritual authority. By attacking that base, the foil is meant to call into question the ability to trust in any source of authority. Graham’s use of the term authority in his recounting of the Forest Home narrative, together with his many conversations and sermons about the nature of the Bible, suggests that one of the biggest differences between him and his fundamentalist cohorts would be, in time, the distinction between the Bible as authoritative (and therefore completely trustworthy) and infallible, or even inerrant.¹⁴⁴ In practical terms, for Graham this meant that the Bible could be seen as a divinely inspired, unshakable guide but not necessarily one in which every word is literally true.¹⁴⁵

What I am suggesting in interpreting the Forest Home narrative through the lens of symbol and culture work is that this story is so successful not just because it speaks to individuals’ fears regarding higher criticism and Biblical authority; I argue

¹⁴³ For the intellectual history of this type of reasoning, dating to Scottish Common Sense Realism, See George Marsden’s *Fundamentalism and American Culture*.

¹⁴⁴ See: Wacker, *America’s Pastor*. pp.36-41, for an overview of Graham’s usage of these terms.

¹⁴⁵ Graham spoke and wrote more about the Bible than possibly any other subject—indeed his mantra was “the Bible says”—but that does not mean he did so systematically or even consistently.

that Graham's narrative uses religious symbols familiar to the audience that express deeper, less specific anxiety over knowledge and power. Graham found power in the cessation of questioning and doubt and he offers that power to anyone willing to follow his example. What makes Obeyesekere's work almost unique amongst psychoanalytically informed scholars of culture is that this is not necessarily a reduction of one to the other. Graham's followers are given a means of combating the mounting fears concerning the direction of history. This move is neither healthy nor pathological but has the possibility to be either depending on the individual who employs it.

One way to contextualize Graham's phenomenal success is to view it in the light of its therapeutic potential. To do so is a two step process examining both the cultural setting and Graham's narrative. Space has confined this paper to the latter of these two steps, yet even with the omission of the examination of the cultural setting, Graham's soaring popularity and cultural importance prove that his message struck a powerful chord in the people of his milieu. His message and success are better understood through the hermeneutic of culture work by appreciating the ways in which his constructed message connected with the deep motivation of his followers.

Suburbia and certainty

To get a better understanding of the fertile ground that Graham was attempting to till, an example of the anxiety felt by those who made him so popular will be helpful. The rise of suburbia in the U.S. is a prime example for a number of reasons. For one, the new suburbanites are Graham's principal demographic: white

and middle-class, many with young families, and starting a new life in a new place. Suburbia contains many of the cultural paradoxes of the age that his ethos of certainty was addressed to, such as consumerism, shifting gender roles, and the ideal of 'togetherness.' Graham's calls to conform, to "Trust and Obey," and to be suspicious of those who question the status quo, were perfect proscriptions for the burgeoning suburban communities.

The suburbs' rise in the 1950s was based on a number of factors. The housing shortage at the end of World War II, economic growth, the rise of the automobile, easy loans provided through the GI bill, and the baby boom all contributed to the flight of white, newly middle-class families out of both farms and the inner-city and into the suburbs. In the 1950s, 18 million people moved to the suburbs.¹⁴⁶ In New York City alone 1.5 million people moved to the suburbs.¹⁴⁷ And in Irving, Texas, the population grew from 2,621 in 1950 to over 45,000 a decade later.¹⁴⁸ William J. Levitt, whose communities in New York and Pennsylvania spurred a host of imitators and the term 'Levittown,' pioneered the technique of building standardized, affordable housing.

The houses came in three basic styles: Cape Cod, ranch, or split-level. Critics were quick to point out how detestable all this 'sameness' was. One writer acidly assured his readers that, "you can be certain all other houses will by precisely like yours, inhabited by people whose age, income, number of children, problems, habits, conversation, possessions and perhaps even blood type are also precisely like

¹⁴⁶ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*. p.112.

¹⁴⁷ Oakley, *God's Country*. p.112.

¹⁴⁸ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*. p.112.

yours.”¹⁴⁹ And the architectural critic, Lewis Mumford, agreed, describing the suburbs as, “a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniformed roads, in a treeless communal wasteland.”¹⁵⁰

The harsh criticism of suburbia was matched with an equally strong fantasy of its perfection. *McCall's* coined the term “togetherness” in its 1954 Easter edition to describe the ideal of suburban families spending more and more time together with less gender role differential.¹⁵¹ Father and mother now shared more of the responsibilities around the house and child rearing. At the center of all of this togetherness sat the television, hailed as both the glue that held families together and as the destroyer of real family interaction. Concomitant with the ideal of spending time together was the model of the housewife and mother.¹⁵² Time magazine called women, “the key figure in all suburbia, the thread that weaves between family and community—the keeper of the suburban dream.”¹⁵³ Women in suburbia were subject to more fetishization than any other family member. From television depictions to magazines and books, suburban housewives were portrayed as happy and content with their lives at home with their children, gossiping with neighbors, and cooking for their husbands—a portrayal that did not include the influx of tranquilizers or diagnoses of depression by male physicians.¹⁵⁴

Whatever the truth about what the suburban experience might have been, the interest here is examining how Graham's ethos of certainty fits within the paradoxical

¹⁴⁹ Oakley, *God's Country*. p.114.

¹⁵⁰ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*. p.112.

¹⁵¹ Oakley, *God's Country*. p.119.

¹⁵² We will discuss gender roles and sexuality in more detail in Chapter 3.

¹⁵³ Oakley, *God's Country*. p.116.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

ideals discussed above. Graham's success was his ability to speak to both of the fantasies about suburbia, its sameness and its supposed perfection. Graham never convinced the sociologists or writers who continued their assault on suburbia but he did seek to reassure those living there that such criticism was the product of too much academic questioning, which wouldn't be a problem for those who accepted Jesus into their hearts.¹⁵⁵ When a young man writes to Graham and asks advise for him and his wife, recently married but who have quickly fallen out of love, Graham tells them that they have not properly adjusted yet and that there is an immediate step that they and all other young couples should take. Graham says: "When two people are unable to make adjustments, there is a third party who will become part of your home and your union and He can solve this problem. Jesus Christ can transform your personal life and can transform your home."¹⁵⁶

In another example, a woman tells Graham that her husband is away for business much of the time and she asks: "Do you think it advisable for me to plan some life of my own and not depend on him for all my happiness? Would it be wrong to have men friends?"¹⁵⁷ Graham responds that she made vows "for better or for worse" but that the Christian view on life will alleviate the matter. Graham explains: "Both the husband and the wife are completely committed to Jesus Christ first, and then to each other. Both seek to do his will, and not their own. By such an arrangement, *happiness in the home is secure*."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ For full-length treatment of religion in the suburbs see: Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs*.

¹⁵⁶ Graham, *My Answer*. p.24.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p.41

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. Emphasis my own.

Graham aims to show that any problem with the idealized family structure stems from an incorrect relationship with Jesus. It does not stem from incorrect readings of the Bible or certain beliefs in general. The problem that Graham is addressing is the way in which one believes in the Bible and in Jesus, not what their teachings were per se. While this approach may be therapeutic in the sense that it acknowledges the discontent felt by those who cannot possibly live up to the idealized standard, in the end it doubles down on the fantasy. Graham holds that Jesus is the ultimate answer to every problem banal to profound. If one still finds plurality and ambiguity disturbing after conversion, perhaps it is time to recommit for the problem is surely not in the ethos but in the doubter.

Chapter 3

Fighting Preachers, Nagging Wives, Perfect Mothers, and Submissive Lovers in Billy Graham's Evangelical Home

As a 'red blooded' sixteen-year-old boy, Billy Graham had little use for the effeminate forms of religious practices he saw around him.¹⁵⁹ Or, at least, that is what Graham has told his listeners over and over again for almost 80 years. As we have discussed in the previous chapters, our goal is not to uncover how Graham felt when he was sixteen, rather it is to explore the reasons why Graham describes his history the way he has. In the previous chapter we saw how Graham's third conversion narrative, the Forest Home story, reflected the need for authoritative certainty in the face of inquisitive doubt. In this chapter we will use the Graham's first conversion story, the sawdust trail, to better understand the role of gender and sex in Graham's message.

The narrative of the story is straightforward: Graham is sixteen when an itinerant 'warhorse' preacher, Mordecai Ham, visits his North Carolina town at the request of a men's Christian club of which his father is a member. Young Graham initially avoids the tent revival either because of his pastor's coolness towards it or because of his own indifference towards the prospect of being evangelized.¹⁶⁰ Eventually Graham is persuaded to attend—how exactly he was persuaded will be

¹⁵⁹ Pollock, *Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography*. p. 6.

¹⁶⁰ Graham, *Just as I Am*. p. 25.

one of the loci of this chapter—and after a number of meetings in which Graham tries to avoid Ham’s accusatory stare by singing (poorly) in the choir behind him, Graham converts and experiences a “180-degree turn”¹⁶¹

In a number of versions of this account, especially early ones, Graham insists that what finally persuaded him to visit the revival was an assurance that Mordecai Ham was a ‘manly’ preacher and that he was no ‘sissy’. Even in Graham’s later, more sanitized, account of the story written in the late 1990s, he insists that his decision to attend was predicated on a friend’s assertion that Ham was a “fighting preacher.”¹⁶² What does it signify when one of the most popular religious figures in American history decides to attend an event that will change his life forever only after he is persuaded that he will not have to participate in a “sissy” type of religion?¹⁶³

This chapter will examine the ways in which gender and sexuality function within Graham’s symbolism. Through Graham’s sawdust trail narrative, his responses in his daily advice column, “My Answer,” and his sermon, “The Home,” we will see how Graham’s use of gendered language and gender roles suggests a normative worldview for his many listeners and readers. This chapter will also contextualize this worldview historically by situating Graham’s views on gender within an ongoing debate, both within evangelicalism and broader American culture, on the proper roles of men and women and the question of gendered religion. The symbolism that Graham presents emerges as a normative response to the confluence of cultural anxieties and societal strains. Graham offers himself and his ministry as a therapy.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 26-27.

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 26.

¹⁶³ Graham, *Billy Graham Talks to Teen-Agers*. p. 10.

The prescription: a fantasy where ministers are manly, the family is a perfect hierarchy with men in control, and wives are both chaste paragons of virtue and sultry mistresses.

Muscular Christianity

Graham's attempt to masculinize evangelical Christianity in the 1950s had historical roots in the muscular Christianity movement of the American Progressive era. The movement began in England through the work of two left-wing novelists, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. Hughes and Kingsley deplored the effects of industrialization on English men and worried that the resulting deterioration would affect not only their moral compasses but also England's imperial ambitions.¹⁶⁴ Their proscription for these ills was equal parts "athleticism, patriotism, and religion."¹⁶⁵ Americans were slow to take up the muscular Christian philosophy. During the movement's height in England in late 1850s and 60s, America was in a much different place socially, economically, and culturally. The Civil War, the largely agrarian economy, and the belief that exercise and religion were mutually exclusive because the former took time better spent on the latter, all contributed to impeding muscular Christianity's growth.¹⁶⁶ When it did begin to catch on, it did so in the industrialized Northeast with liberal clerics such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Henry Ward Beecher.

¹⁶⁴ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*. pp.11-13.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p.12.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. pp.21-24.

After 1880, not only did many of the deterrents to the movement begin to fall, but factors arose that would impel Americans to enthusiastically adopt its tenets. One of those factors was the growing concern of both clerical and secular leaders that the U.S. was becoming “overcivilized.”¹⁶⁷ There were psychological symptoms, such as the ubiquitous diagnosis of “neurasthenia,” or nerve sickness, that the leaders pointed to during the era, but there was also a whole host of ‘modern’ threats that invigorated the movement as well.¹⁶⁸ These threats included: urbanization (with the concomitant worry of “city rot”), an influx of immigrants who largely settled in those cities, a rise in saloons, gambling, and drinking in those cities by those immigrants, and the ascendancy of the “modern woman” and the women’s movement.¹⁶⁹ At the same time as these threats were arising, WASP leaders began to fret that industrialization and commodification were making white males, and especially white boys, ‘soft,’ so soft that they would not be able to cope with these threats and in failing to do so would cause a veritable “race suicide.”¹⁷⁰ In sum, the white male establishment became worried that they were losing their grip on their cultural hegemony and sought a program that would reify the cultural hierarchy and their place at its peak.

The program they adopted, muscular Christianity, aimed to affect all levels of society, not just the spiritual. In order to keep boys, who were particularly impressionable, away from feminine influences, leaders of the movement called for women to be replaced by men in both secular schools and Sunday schools.

Additionally, groups such as the YMCA and the Boy Scouts arose to fill the urgent

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p.26.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p.28.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. pp.28-29.

need of strengthening boys' muscles, introducing them to the outdoors, and advocating the "Strenuous Life."¹⁷¹ In the churches, the reformers hoped to rid the stigma of "womanliness" from the profession of minister and attract more muscular and well-rounded men as opposed to the effeminate, intellectual types that they commonly saw.¹⁷² These womanly, bookish ministers had been in power too long, thought the advocates of muscular Christianity, and they had been ministering to a church that was far too full of women. Muscular Christians were right in much of their prognosis; in 1899 women made up three quarters of the membership in Protestant American churches and accounted for nine-tenths of its attendance.¹⁷³ Groups like Men and the Religion Forward Movement attempted to change those numbers by drawing on the ethos of muscular Christianity and creating men-only revival meetings.¹⁷⁴ Lastly, the clerics of muscular Christianity sought to re-cast the figure of Jesus from a venerable sage or helpless infant to a muscular, tough manly-man.¹⁷⁵

The effects of the muscular Christianity movement of the Progressive era were wide-ranging and in some instances profound. Organizations such as the YMCA, the Boy Scouts, and the Gideons (famous now for their supplying hotel Bibles) were either founded or became popular during this time. Additionally, cultural staples such as college athletics, the national parks and forest system, and

¹⁷¹ Ibid. pp.31-33.

¹⁷² Ibid. p.82

¹⁷³ Ibid. p.41.

¹⁷⁴ See: Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism."

¹⁷⁵ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*. p. 92.

out-door leisure magazines had either philosophical or actual roots in the movement. Nonetheless, the movement constituted as such did not succeed past World War I. Following the War, the leaders of the movement were criticized for fanning the flames of the war with their patriotic, muscular brand of Christianity.¹⁷⁶ The movement had other problems as well. From the beginning, muscular Christianity was the object and intention of a group of white Protestant men who would later comprise what is now understood as liberal or Progressive Christianity. The termination of muscular Christianity amongst this group corresponds with a liberal/conservative split that takes place in the 1920s. It is the conservative or fundamentalist side of the divide that takes up some, but not all, of the muscular Christians' philosophy in the years that follow.

The years between 1920 and WWII saw major shifts in women's political life with enfranchisement, social life with the Jazz Age of the 20s, and economic life with the Great Depression of the 30s. There were other changes that occurred within the secluded fundamentalist community. The general view of fundamentalism of this period was that after the embarrassment of the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925, in which Clarence Darrow successfully humiliated William Jennings Bryan and his literalist understanding of the Bible but unsuccessfully defended his client John T. Scopes, the fundamentalists then retreated from society to lick their wounds. While there is a measure of truth in these narratives, recently historians have demonstrated that the outcome of the trial was more ambiguous at the time—subsequent literary works and movies such as *Inherit the Wind*, which is as much about the McCarthy

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p.195.

Trials of the 1950s as it was about the ‘Monkey’ Trial of the 20s, were partially responsible for the prevailing narrative. Most historians now believe that although fundamentalists may have retreated from public view, they were actively reorganizing and building their own educational and ecclesiastical institutions.¹⁷⁷

During the interwar period, fundamentalists began to coalesce around a number of institutes of higher education, such as Fuller, Wheaton, Moody, Westminster, and Pepperdine.¹⁷⁸ They also began defining and refining their theologies and social views, with premillennial dispensationalism and Biblical literalism becoming central to the former and conservatism and withdrawal to the latter.¹⁷⁹ Though they did not continue all of the programs set forth by the earlier muscular Christianity movement, for example exercise was never seen in the same holy light, the fundamentalists did continue to expand upon the roles that each gender should play in religion and society. Their biggest concern was replacing women as the center of religious life and setting up men as defenders of both the religion and of the meeker, more corruptible, sex.¹⁸⁰ For example, William Bell Riley, a major fundamentalist cleric who played an outsized role in the life of Billy Graham by appointing him President of his Northwestern Bible School at the time of his death, published a book of sermons called *Wives of the Bible: A Cross-Section of Femininity*

¹⁷⁷ See: Larson, *Summer for the Gods*; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*.

¹⁷⁸ Coalesce may be too strong a term. Fundamentalists were schismatic almost by definition. See: Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*; Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*; Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*.

¹⁷⁹ Premillennial dispensationalism is the eschatological theory of history that proposes set periods of time or dispensations that result in the return of Jesus Christ before his one thousand year reign on Earth.

¹⁸⁰ Bendroth, *Fundamentalism & Gender, 1875 to the Present*. pp. 53-57.

(1938). In this book he describes women as either duplicitous and prone to evil or motherly and passive.¹⁸¹ Or, from Harold Ockenga, a foundational figure for the neo-evangelical movement and another figure who played a monumental role in the life of Graham, on women's authority in church settings: "Whenever a woman has headed an authoritative preaching movement heresy has crept in."¹⁸² Just as with the muscular Christianity movement before them and Graham's crusades after, fundamentalists of the inter-war period were not able to achieve the fully masculine Christianity they desired; women still comprised a majority of every aspect of the church except leadership.¹⁸³

Graham was raised within this fundamentalist framework of gender and sex. The genius of his ministry was his ability to translate fundamentalist dogma into proscriptions and mores palatable to the vast majority of white, post-WWII America. While his success is undoubtedly remarkable, it should be remembered that most of his gender theories have their roots in those championed by the white Protestant establishment of the 1890s-1920s.

No "Sissy" Stuff

The events that led up to Graham's decision to attend the Ham revival are unsurprisingly garbled. Graham has told the story so many times to so many different audiences over a period of almost 80 years, it is no wonder that there is obfuscation. However, this cloudiness will be to our advantage. As I have stated before, we are not

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p.64.

¹⁸² Ibid. p.82.

¹⁸³ Ibid. p.30.

attempting to gain access to the *facts* of what happened, rather we are interested in how the different ways Graham tells the story shed light on his ministry and his ideology.

By 1997, when Graham published his official autobiography *Just as I Am*, the story had become sanitized. In this account, Graham explains that he resists the tent revival despite his parents' enthusiasm until two events sway him. First, Mordecai Ham accused students at Graham's high school of gross moral lapses and even claimed to possess signed affidavits from certain students to prove it.¹⁸⁴

Coincidentally, right as the scandal broke, Albert McMakin, the son of a sharecropper on Graham's land, asked Graham if he wanted to go hear the "fighting preacher."¹⁸⁵

"Is he a *fighter*?" I asked. That put a little different slant on things. I *like* a fighter."¹⁸⁶

Graham then tells us that he accompanied McMakin and several other teens to the revival, and the chain of events that led to his life as the Protestant Pope was put into motion.

If his more recent accounts are explicit about what intrigued Graham about the 'fighting' preacher, older ones illuminate what caused him to stay away for so long. In John Pollock's 1966 authorized biography of Graham, we are told that McMakin tells him that Ham is no "sissy."¹⁸⁷ While in a book addressed to teens written in 1958, Graham reports: "I had always thought of religion as more or less "sissy stuff," and that a fellow who was going to be an athlete would have no time for such things. It was alright for old men and girls, but not for real "he-men" with red blood in their

¹⁸⁴ Graham, *Just as I Am*. p. 26.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸⁷ Pollock, *Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography*. p.6.

veins.”¹⁸⁸ Thus, when Graham was told that Ham was a “fighting preacher” he says: “I was interested, for anything about a scrap of a fight was all I wanted.”¹⁸⁹

These accounts written in the late 50s and 60s were by no means aberrations of Graham’s thoughts on gender and religion at the time. A good source of insight into the subject is Graham’s advice column, “My Answer”. Founded in 1952, the syndicated column appeared in two hundred newspapers at its peak with the possible readership of twenty million.¹⁹⁰ By the end of the decade, in 1960, Graham published a collection of the columns under the same title through a major non-evangelical publisher and rereleased the book with slight variations in 1972 and 2008. Unsurprisingly, *My Answer*’s aim first and foremost is evangelism, yet it is still an advice column, meaning that its subject matter is mostly sex, family, and work.

My Answer presents a fuller example of Graham’s views on gender, sex, and their place in religion. In Graham’s work there is a sense that there are numerous wives who are piously concerned over the state of their significant others’ souls, whilst at the same time these women are encouraged to take a subordinate role in the marriage relationship. This is Graham’s expression of the shaky, ambivalent place of women within evangelicalism. On the one hand it is common knowledge that women make up the majority of church members and active lay participants at revivals, crusades, and in congregations. Women are also regularly held up as beacons of spiritual fidelity, placed on a pedestal of religiosity for others to admire. Yet, at the same time, women are regularly relegated to subordinate roles in family life and very

¹⁸⁸ Graham, *Billy Graham Talks to Teen-Agers*. p.10.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*. p.22

rarely found in the upper echelons of the Church hierarchy or for that matter in parachurch organizations, such as Graham's BGEA. Additionally, women are often seen as the weaker vessel, more prone to deception or evil, just like their ancestor Eve. All the while, the femininity of evangelicalism is regularly bemoaned as problematic, systemic, and detrimental to both religion and society. The young Graham is not interested in 'sissy' religion. What he needs is a masculine, tough religion. That is what he finds in Mordecai Ham's tent and by presenting it as his origin story, that is what he signals to others that they will find in him.

A sample of Graham's advice from *My Answer* will suffice as evidence. In one instance a woman asks Graham for help with her husband. She says: "I am a Christian but my husband isn't. I think he makes unreasonable demands and is most of the time very disagreeable. How much must I take from him before I rebel and walk out?"¹⁹¹ Graham replies: "It would seem to me that the Christian must always manifest the greatest patience and understanding. Your willingness to submit to him at all cost, providing it does not violate your Christian devotion to your Lord, is that which will be most effective in winning him to your Lord. Insisting on your own rights will not always achieve the desired end."¹⁹² To a different inquiry on a similar subject Graham tells a woman: "Many good wives are well intentioned, but get over anxious that their husbands immediately conform to their views. Often their insistence takes the form of "nagging," and no person is ever led to Christ in such a manner."¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Graham, *My Answer*. p.32.

¹⁹² Ibid. pp.32-33.

¹⁹³ Ibid. p.45.

In another telling instance a wife complains to Graham that her husband stays out too late, saying: “Many nights each week my husband doesn’t come home until nearly after twelve o’clock. I still love him and don’t want a divorce. What should I do?”¹⁹⁴ Graham replies: “Tell your husband you love him, and try to show it in little ways. Don’t greet him with nagging and complaints. When you expect him home see that the house is in order, and be as careful of your personal appearance as you did in the days when he was courting you.”¹⁹⁵ In a similar vein, when a woman reveals to Graham that her husband is having an affair but he is unaware of her knowledge, Graham reprimands her, saying: “I must frankly say that your meek silence is in part to blame for your husband’s philandering. He either thinks you don’t love him, you don’t care, or that you are not smart enough to know what is going on right under your nose.”¹⁹⁶

Lastly, when a woman tells Graham she feels called to missionary work, Graham instructs her otherwise. He says: “My dear woman, the greatest mission service a married woman can render is to be a devoted Christian mother. Let your home be your parish, your little brood your congregation, your living room a sanctuary, and your knee a sacred altar.”¹⁹⁷

The messages given by Graham reflect the ambivalence towards women found in evangelicalism of the era as a whole. Women are at times seen as more religious than men, more pious, more spiritual. Yet, this spiritual superiority is subverted by women’s seemingly natural inability to lead. We can see this

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p.29.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p.39.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p.254.

assumption play out in the examples above; any time a woman tries to convert her husband by active, conventional evangelistic means, she is seen as ‘nagging.’ Instead, the best way for women to proselytize is submit, remain quiet, and be sexually presentable and available. Here we find Graham’s evangelical ideal woman. The perfect woman is at once spiritually superior and completely submissive, she is attractive but not flaunting, she is responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of her family but is barred from acting assertively.

Another common characteristic found in Graham’s writing on gender and sex is the propensity to blame the woman for the sins of the man. In part, this stems from the assumption of woman as spiritually superior yet also responsible for her husband’s sexual satisfaction. The argument would sound something like: A wife is so morally superior to her husband that his sins reflect her inability to keep him satisfied both sexually and spiritually, therefore when a man cheats on his wife it is her own fault. The wife should have been more attentive, she should have made herself more available sexually, and she should have kept a better home. Graham is not content to simply acknowledge the universality of sin, as he does constantly; here he also blames the victim to allay the guilt of the sinner. Graham’s teachings contain a mixed, contradictory message on the spiritual and sexual nature of women. On the one hand, women and purity are linked, yet on the other, women must be sexually accessible and accommodating or else they are to blame for their husbands’ sins.

Of course, Graham’s beliefs have a history of their own. There is a direct link between Graham’s teachings on gender and sex and the movement in late 19th century that historians have called muscular Christianity. Gender studies theorists have

pointed out that both the 1890s and 1950s can be understood as periods of masculinity crisis.¹⁹⁸ At the end of the 19th century, both religious and secular leaders expressed this crisis. Men such as G. Stanley Hall called for boys to be brought up to be more manly to avoid what he believed would surely lead to “race suicide” if the trend of effeminate white males continued.¹⁹⁹ Religious clerics bemoaned the effeminacy of religion. To remedy the situation they called for more manly preachers, fewer women teaching religion, and a more masculine conception of Jesus.²⁰⁰ For example, Walter Rauschenbusch, one the architects of the Social Gospel Movement, said that: “There was nothing mushy, nothing sweetly effeminate about Jesus...[Jesus] was a man’s man...[who] turned again and again on the snarling pack of his pious enemies and made them slink away.”²⁰¹

The prophets of muscular Christianity at the turn of the 20th century were responding to changing demographics, new theologies and sciences, and shifting labor roles. The result of these changes was a renewed emphasis on masculinity and a push to change the Victorian ideal of a man from gentle and reflective to aggressive and active.²⁰² The anxiety over losing their cultural hegemony pushed white Protestant men in the progressive era to reify gender roles and reaffirm their dominance. A similar anxiety drove Graham’s brand of evangelical Christianity. Though much more far-reaching than gender and sex, his ministry was deeply

¹⁹⁸ See: Kimmel, *Manhood in America*.

¹⁹⁹ Putney, *Muscular Christianity*. p.122.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. pp.73-99.

²⁰¹ Ibid. p.42.

²⁰² Ibid. p.5.

concerned with establishing fixed gender roles and masculinizing evangelicalism in the face of post-war anxieties.

The pressures that Graham responded to were many. One major change was the place of American women in the workforce. During WWII, women entered the workforce in record numbers. By the end of the war, women constituted over 35 percent of the national workforce and occupied jobs that paid better than the traditional jobs assigned to them, such as waitresses, launderers, and domestic housekeepers.²⁰³ After the war, as this trend began to fade, society began to romanticize and celebrate the ideal of the domestic woman. This fantasy was in stark contrast to war propaganda such as Rosie the Riveter, which called on empowered women to help the war effort, yet patriotism was once again invoked to encourage working women to return home. Graham was part of this larger project.

We have already seen one good example of this taken from Graham's advice column, *My Answer*, when he instructs a mother who feels called to mission work that "the greatest missionary service a married woman can render is to be a devoted Christian mother."²⁰⁴ Graham outlined the hierarchy of the household repeatedly throughout his career and especially during the 1950s and 60s. In an early example taken from his influential and popular work, *Peace with God*, Graham set out what would become boilerplate evangelical family mores: "God declared marriage to be good because he knew that man needed a helpmate and woman needed a protector... It is woman's role to love and help and reassure her husband in every way she

²⁰³ Donaldson, *The Making of Modern America*. p.8.

²⁰⁴ Graham, *My Answer*. p.254.

can.”²⁰⁵ Or, more directly, he states in *My Answer*: “Follow the Bible admonition and be obedient and submissive to your husband.”²⁰⁶

The Home

Graham’s message can be heard in different ways. As we have already seen, both his autobiography and his advice column are filled with his proscriptions, symbols, and mores. The space that embodies the purest ‘Graham’ in an ideal sense is his sermons. He was first and foremost an evangelical preacher and as such, the sermon was his true vehicle. Graham spoke with more people face to face than anyone in history (with the possible of exception of Pope John Paul II) and the great majority of those people heard him preach a sermon.²⁰⁷ The message that Graham preached in his sermons and the way in which it was delivered were remarkably uniform. As historian Grant Wacker has pointed out, though Graham loosely structured his sermons around a Biblical text, John 3:16 served as the tacit text for every sermon.²⁰⁸ Additionally, Wacker relays that a close friend of Graham’s once quipped to him, “If you have heard Billy ten times, you probably have heard all of his sermons.”²⁰⁹ Wacker even asserts that: “One could go further. Graham likely would

²⁰⁵ Graham, *Peace with God*. p.193.

²⁰⁶ Graham, *My Answer*. p.35.

²⁰⁷ Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*. p. vii.

²⁰⁸ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*. p.58. John 3:16 reads: “God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

have felt complimented if the friend had said that if you heard *one* of Billy's sermons, you have heard them all."²¹⁰

The ubiquity of Graham's evangelistic message in its jeremiad form notwithstanding, his sermons covered a variety of themes to convey his message. Additionally, Graham changed or modified his sermons over the years to include examples drawn from the news and to reflect the changing anxieties from decade to decade. The sermon we will look at below, "The Home," is listed fifteen times in Graham's archive at Wheaton College. The earliest example listed in the archive was delivered in London in 1954 and the latest was in Rochester, NY, in 1988. The example we will examine below comes from Graham's 1957 New York Crusade. I chose this example for a number of reasons. Firstly, for practical reasons: this example is written out whereas some of the others are simply outlines of text with handwritten notes. Secondly, the New York Crusade was seminal in Graham's development. On the one hand it cut the last remaining cord with the old guard of the fundamentalist movement that he grew out of and on the other, it secured Graham's position as the leading cleric of the new evangelicals.²¹¹ While the details of the message might have changed, the core has remained the same. This is true of both Graham's evangelism and to a lesser extent his stance on gender and sex. However, even if Graham had completely changed his views on hierarchic gender roles, the fact that he was so persistent about them during his peak years of fame and influence make them worthy of examination.

²¹⁰ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

²¹¹ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. pp.225-238.

Women in the “Home”

Graham begins his sermon “The Home” with the same caveat that precedes most of his marital advice. He tells his audience that marriage is a divine institution, that God Himself arranged and sanctioned the first marriage, and that any marriage that disregards God’s rules of marriage will end in failure. In Graham’s words: “But He [God] warned, ‘If you neglect my laws, if you deliberately reject my laws, if you do not keep my laws concerning marriage, it will end on the rocks.’”²¹² Note how God speaks in the idiom of the day to make his point understood.

After establishing that the marriage contract is put in place by God and that the reason for so much marital struggle is the disregard of this fact, Graham turns to the Biblical injunctions for each unit of the family: the wife, husband, and children. The first responsibility of a wife, Graham instructs, is to revere her husband. He offers the analogy that has become a well-worn proscription for conservative Protestant families - the relationship of wife to husband should be similar to that of husband to Christ. “That’s what the Bible says. As Christ is the head of the church, so the husband is the head of the home. And the wife is to reverence her husband.”²¹³ Setting aside for the moment the obvious question of whether that metaphor pertains only to the realm of reverence in the marital and spiritual relation or whether it also holds in other aspects of the relationship, such as sex or marital disputes, it is clear that Graham is setting up a hierarchy of the household. He reinforces this hierarchy with the next responsibility of the wife, namely to submit. “The Bible says that the wife is to submit in everything to her husband. Now, how many wives do that?...Now

²¹² Graham, “The Home.” p.6.

²¹³ Ibid. p.7.

that means in every realm—that means the realm of sex.”²¹⁴ Lastly, Graham locates the third and fourth responsibilities of the wife to love her husband and children and to keep the house. “The wife is to keep the home, not keep the club and the bridge parties, but to keep the home.”²¹⁵

Graham then goes off script, or rather off scripture.²¹⁶ He tells his audience that he has some suggestions that are his “own ideas.”²¹⁷ Graham suggests that women be attractive. “No wonder some husbands don’t want to come home...There is no excuse for any women not being beautiful.”²¹⁸ Graham then relays a charming anecdote to illustrate his point, saying: “One lady came to me in this crusade and she said, ‘Mr. Graham, do you think that a Christian ought to wear makeup?’ I looked her over and said, ‘Well, lady, you need a little.’”²¹⁹ He also instructs the listening wives in the audience to keep the house clean, curtail expenditures, not to gossip, to make the house attractive yet also a great place for children to play in and bring their friends home to, and not to nag and complain.

As a closing exhortation, Graham pleads with women to be a Christian mother and to take Christ into their hearts, saying: “I don’t think any woman can be a wife properly, or be a mother properly, unless Christ is in her heart.”²²⁰ Graham asks the women to search their souls for the sake of their marriages and their children: “Are

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ The question of whether or not any of Graham’s previous advice was ‘spiritual’ is irrelevant to the discussion at hand. When Graham says, “the Bible says:” we allow that he is invoking the authority of the Bible to justify his point without questioning the validity of that justification in the scripture itself.

²¹⁷ Graham, “The Home.” p. 8.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid. p.9.

you the kind of wife you *ought* to be? If not, give your life to Jesus Christ... Let Him make you the kind of wife and the kind of mother that you *ought* to be. I think every child has the right to a Christian mother, a mother who lives for Christ, a mother who goes to church, a mother who reads the Bible.”²²¹

Men in the “Home”

Graham’s treatment of men in his sermon is shorter than the section on women - about a page and a half of text compared to over three. Not surprising then that the exhortations to men are less sharp, more general. In fact, when Graham gets specific, it usually has to do with something men should do for their wives. For example, Graham tells men that the Bible says that they are to love their wives and that a good way to express that is to buy them things when they are not expecting it. He says: “You know, it’s the little things that mean so much to a woman... It’s the little thoughtful things; the telephone calls from the office or the shop every day; a little flower that you might pick along the way yourself; a little bit of candy. Maybe I shouldn’t say that because it is fattening.”²²²

Graham tells men to love their wives, to cleave to them. He tells them that the Bible says they need to provide for their wives and families. “The Bible says if you don’t provide adequately for your own family, you’re worse than an infidel.”²²³ And, lastly that men should be courteous, as courteous as they were before they were married. Then, just as with the section on women, Graham comes to the inevitable

²²¹ Ibid. (emphasis my own)

²²² Ibid. p.10.

²²³ Ibid.

call to accept Jesus Christ as the only possibility of being a good father, husband, and man. “He’ll give you the strength, the courage, the wisdom, the gentleness, and the patience that you’ve been searching for.”²²⁴

Again, in the section addressed to men, Graham mentions that men’s relationship with their wives should be the mirror image of their own relationship with Christ. Graham quotes Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it.”²²⁵ Graham intends this to be hierarchical and insists that men, even in their role as leaders, must have compassion and love for their wives and children. However, it is hard to ignore the questions that this analogy raises in regards to sex and the spirit. As we noted above, Graham explicitly links the submission of the wife to the husband with being sexually available and attractive to him. If man’s relationship to Christ mirrors the divine marriage contract in place for women, does that mean that part of the man’s duty is to be sexually available to Jesus? The Biblical texts, Ephesians 5:22-24, are evoked so often by conservative Protestants to justify the subservience of wives to husbands but this question is rarely asked even by scholars of religion.

Before Graham’s final call for ‘inquirers,’ he tells his audience that fathers are the spiritual leaders of the household. What this means is vague and that imprecision speaks to a certain hedging on Graham’s part. Graham suggests that the father is responsible if the family is spiritually neglectful but that he should not necessarily be the most religious or pious member of the family. Compare two of his statements, the first for men, the second for women: “The Bible says that God holds that man is

²²⁴ Ibid. p.11.

²²⁵ Ibid.

responsible if there is not daily prayer in the house.”²²⁶ Yet, when Graham discusses the ideal Christian mother, he evokes his mother: “Oh, when I think of my own mother, how she used to read the Bible and pray, I will never get over that heritage. It put something in my life and in my character that I will never forget.”²²⁷

The message is not explicit but what Graham implies is that a Christian mother is the true spiritual role model of the family while the father is ultimately responsible for any spiritual lapses. The trouble that Graham faces in expressing this point corresponds directly with his program of masculine Christianity. As we have seen, Victorian mores held that religiosity was an effeminate trait, and that characteristic held despite the best efforts of the Muscular Christianity movement at the turn of the century. Graham is doing his best to maintain not only the spiritual importance of the man but also the manly quality of spirituality itself.

Anxiety and Order

How can we make sense of both Graham’s views on gender and his place within the lineage of American Protestants? On the one hand, Graham is reiterating and expanding on views of sexuality that are rooted not only in the turn of the century muscular Christianity and inter-war fundamentalist dogma, but also in theologies of Christianity that go back to the earliest days of its history. Graham’s enormous popularity, his influence on politicians and their constituents, and his ability to reframe fundamentalist theology into a theology eminently accessible to the new suburban America make Graham’s case unique.

²²⁶ Ibid. p.13.

²²⁷ Ibid. pp.9-10.

One way of thinking through these Protestant theories of gender and sex is through the heuristic category of ecumenical anxiety. I have discussed this term elsewhere in the context of conflicts over the translation of the Bible amongst Anglo-Protestants.²²⁸ There I discussed the deification of the King James Bible (KJV) by a small but vocal movement called the King James Only Movement in terms of anxiety over the inability to authoritatively speak about the one thing that is supposed to have absolute authority—the Bible—because of the proliferation of alternative versions and translations. That ecumenical anxiety, the anxiety produced by the discord between the logic of beliefs such as *sola scriptura* and the priesthood of all believers and the inability to faithfully put one's trust in the Bible (because of the variety of Bibles), created a *need* to assert the absolute supremacy of the KJV, going so far as to call it the only divinely inspired text.

This line of thinking can inform our questioning of Graham. As we have seen in Chapter Two, Graham's conversion narrative at Forest Home was at its core concerned with reasserting the authority and reliability of the Bible in the face of rational doubts to the contrary—at that point Graham was still using his trusty KJV but would later use a myriad of different texts, which remained authoritative so long as they were *the* Bible. In our present case, Graham is primarily concerned with asserting the authority of the male husband, the masculine form of evangelicalism, and the submissiveness of the female wife in the face of shifting societal values and mores of sex and gender. What ecumenical anxiety means here is the discordance felt by plurality, shifting identity roles and the drive to correct that discordance through

²²⁸ See: Berger, "The History of the King James Bible as a Source and Response to Ecumenical Anxiety."

universalist theories. Other scholars of religion have noted this sort of anxiety in different contexts. For example, Charles Strozier, a psychoanalyst influenced by Heinz Kohut, has written about his experience interviewing fundamentalists about their fantasies of the return of Jesus. Strozier says:

In the broadest possible sense, the men I encountered tended to imagine the end as an extension of their traditional hierarchic and patriarchal Christianity. The often reflected male fears of the breakdown of social and sexual roles in society, and their images of nuclear and end time destruction in general were harsh.²²⁹

Graham's ideal of hierarchic gender roles and sexual submission represents a different type of fantasy in response to the same type of stimulus. Whereas Strozier's subjects create destructive end time scenarios that help alleviate the pressure of change, isolation, and plurality, Graham creates a mythical "home" in which everything returns to a fabled time when men are to their wives as Christ is to them.

There are a number of different registers in which Graham attempts to alleviate his and his culture's anxiety of plurality. The attempts to masculinize religion and disparage its feminine qualities are mostly in line with his turn of the century forebears. In Graham's case he uses his conversion narrative, his testimony, to create positive or negative valences, symbols that convey a hierarchy of values. The most prominent theme Graham employs is that of a *fighting* preacher. Just as the muscular Christianity movement sought to replace effeminate, intellectual clergy at the turn of the century, Graham is advocating for a masculinized cleric, especially in the face of the pastoral, "sissy" religion.

²²⁹ Strozier, *Apocalypse*. p.124.

Another register in which Graham expresses his anxiety of plurality is by evoking a link between national crisis and moral acts. The historian Sarah Moslener has explored this issue in 20th century evangelicalism as a whole. In her work she shows how evangelical clerics link their conservative sexual mores with the sanctity and wellbeing of the nation at large.²³⁰ We will deal with this issue extensively in Chapter Four, where it will be apparent that for Graham, all sins, not sexual ones exclusively, have the ability to contaminate national wellbeing. However, the shifting gender roles in mid-20th century America loom large in Graham's fears and therefore also in his proscriptive symbolism.

Graham's ambivalent conception of the woman's role in the ideal evangelical home is also indicative of the pluralistic fear that we will consider here. In all three of the mediums we discussed above, Graham's conversion narrative, his advice column, and his sermon, there is slippage in both the ideal woman's role and the way that the feminine is prescribed in his gendered symbolism. As for the former, Graham oscillates between the ideal of a spiritually pristine evangelical woman whose faith is *naturally* greater than men's and the conception of woman as the weaker vessel, easily corruptible and therefore responsible for both her own sins and her family's. In the case of the latter, Graham disparages the feminine form of evangelicalism or put differently, he is opposed to feminine evangelicalism in its emotional, tender forms.

In Graham's ambivalent, contradictory conception of women, we can see the so-called Madonna-whore complex clearly. Sigmund Freud is often credited with

²³⁰ See: Moslener, *Virgin Nation*.

identifying the disorder.²³¹ What concerned Freud about the complex was male patients who were impotent only with their wives but not with women whom they did not respect; however, the ethos of the complex was quickly applied to culture writ large.²³² For Freud, the disorder was ‘psychical impotence,’ its symptoms were not only the inability to copulate with a respected spouse but also the inability to enjoy it even if the mechanics functioned correctly, and the root cause was, unsurprisingly, the Oedipal complex.²³³

The difference between Graham’s fantasy of the ideal woman, one that is both perfect mother and accessible plaything, and Freud’s concept is the degree to which Graham feels comfortable attributing seductive qualities to ‘proper’ women. The examples above bear this out. Graham instructs women to dress as they did when they were being courted and to wear make-up but he does not think they should dress in a suggestive manner. Women are to be sexually accessible at all times but not the aggressor or initiator of sexual activity. This construction does change amongst both evangelicals and the broader American culture in the late-60s and 70s with the sexual revolution, but in the 1950s it would have been scandalous for Graham to present his

²³¹ Freud, “A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men.” p.391. Freud is often said to have coined the term. The closest language I have found in Freud’s work is: “This very relation of the sharpest contrast between ‘mother’ and ‘prostitute’ will however encourage us to enquire into the history of the development of these two complexes and the unconscious relation between them...”

²³² Hartmann, “Sigmund Freud and His Impact on Our Understanding of Male Sexual Dysfunction.” p. 2335.

²³³ Freud, “On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love.” p.398. Note: 1. Here Freud is only considering the subject from the point of view of the male. 2. He is implying an Oedipal complex in which the male has become too fixated upon the mother.

ideal woman as seductress.²³⁴ So whereas Graham's fantasy of the Madonna-whore complex differentiates in points from its classic psychoanalytic construct, what is most similar is the ideal ambivalent fantasy.

The feeling of impotence works well for Graham's historical context, and our argument here is that his ministry is a creative response to that anxiety. Men and women in the mid-20th century were experiencing dramatic and often times contradictory messages about their proper roles in society. From Rosie the Riveter to Lucille Ball, the rise of suburbia, the growth of commercial culture, and economic success with cold war nightmares, it is no wonder W.H. Auden called it the Age of Anxiety. The historian J. Ronald Oakley suggested that: "It was, in short, the ideal patriarchal family of the thirties and forties, not the family of the fifties in which the mother often worked and the cohesiveness of the family unit was being undermined by the demands and problems of the complex, tense, atomic age."²³⁵ Into this mix Graham inserts his ideal woman. It is an ideal that attempts to address the impotence of males in the face of cultural conceptions of powerful women while at the same time reasserting the mythologized gender roles of the previous generation. In this reading, it makes sense that his symbols are contradictory; the impetuosity of his desire reflects this. What is important for Graham is not any contradictory conception but that the conception is ordained by God above and therefore not subject to critical debate.

²³⁴ See: DeRogatis, "What Would Jesus Do? Sexuality and Salvation in Protestant Evangelical Sex Manuals, 1950s to the Present."

²³⁵ Oakley, *God's Country*. p. 118.

It is the ambivalence and contradictions of the cultural pronouncements that give Graham's schizophrenic symbolism so much of their power. Gary Donaldson frames this incongruity: "By 1950, society had begun to romanticize—even celebrate—domesticity, motherhood, and the traditional concepts of the woman at home, while rejecting the wartime notion of independence, strength, and American women in the workplace."²³⁶ The cultural ideals were moving in different directions and within that tension, Graham arises with a message to address the chaos, the plurality. His message is rooted in the timeless, he posits, but it reflects perfectly the contemporary anxiety of the place of men and women in their new post-war world.

²³⁶ Donaldson, *The Making of Modern America*. p. 8.

Chapter 4

Nuclear Homiletics, Cosmic Fantasy, and Pastor to Presidents

After Billy Graham's life changing decision at Forest Home to abandon doubt and embrace certainty, he quickly became one of the most famous evangelists of his era. That meteoric rise began with his 1949 Los Angeles crusade. At the 'Canvas Cathedral,' Graham went from being a rising star in the insular fundamentalist world to a prominent figure in the national press. He did so for several reasons: he attracted movie and radio stars whom he persuaded to give testimonials, he received a huge bump in the press when the newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst, told his reporters to "Puff Graham," and by his own account, it was God's will that he should become his powerful servant.²³⁷ There is another reason for his success, one that is acknowledged less frequently. Days before the crusade began, the Soviets successfully tested their first atom bomb. Graham used the news to craft a novel apocalyptic scenario for his listeners to imagine. Graham combined nuclear apocalyptic imagery with the rising tide of anti-Communist sentiment to create a cosmic fantasy that pitted the divinely sanctioned U.S. in a holy war against the Soviet Union. From this fantasy, Graham spun a host of judgments and prescriptive morals that equated personal virtue with national security and turned geopolitical skirmishes into cosmic battlegrounds.

The relationship between evangelicals and the cold war is complex. To start, evangelicals were never monolithic in their reactions to the various fronts of the cold

²³⁷ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.117.

war. Additionally, the cultural impact of the tensions with the Soviet Union fluctuated during the 1950s—not to mention the 60s, 70s, and 80s.²³⁸ The cold war was essential for the creation of evangelicalism as we know it since the 1950s. It gave formerly isolated fundamentalists a point of contact with the larger culture and a domain in which they could participate politically. Graham and his cohorts among the neo-evangelicals and newly formed National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) were at the vanguard of this point of contact.

This chapter will examine the points of contact between evangelicals and the culture of the cold war in the 1950s and 60s through the lens of Billy Graham's ministry. The arenas of the relationship that we will explore are eschatology, civil religion, and politics. Though the three arenas have substantial overlap, viewing them separately will be heuristically beneficial. The section on the eschatology of the cold war will examine the ways in which Graham situated the Soviet Union and the atom bomb into an already established eschatological evangelical framework. The section on civil religion will show how Graham blended American nationalism with evangelicalism and the ways in which this admixture functioned within McCarthy's anti-Communism America. Lastly, this section will include the means by which Graham ingratiated himself with politicians of his era by employing his ideals of civil religion and anti-Communism to declare politicians and their policies as divinely ordained. We will see that through his association with those in the halls of power, Graham gained wider acceptance for fundamentalist dogma, including the fetishization of end-time scenarios.

²³⁸ See for example: Oakley, *God's Country*; Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*; Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*.

Eschatology: Death by Fire

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. -- II Peter 3:10

God's providential role in human history and the concomitant place of that history's end have been established pillars of the Christian faith since its inception, indeed were important beliefs before the birth of Christianity. Hundreds of scholarly works investigate the functions and varieties of eschatological beliefs: newer works such as Reza Aslan's *Zealot* that speculates on the messianic and radical aspects of Jesus, to classics such as Norman Cohen's *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, which details the regular outbreak of messianic fantasy during the Middle Ages.²³⁹ Dwarfing the scholarly interpretations is the mountain of prophecy writings that have attempted to decipher God's plan and predict the future (or lack thereof) of humans on earth. The role of prophesy and its place in the history of Christianity is well beyond the scope of this paper but I will follow a functionalist approach to this material much like the one adopted by historian Paul Boyer. He states: "Prophecy belief is a way of ordering experience. It gives a grand, overarching shape to history, and thus ultimate meaning to lives of individuals caught up in history's stream."²⁴⁰ Here we will see the ways in which Graham connected his prophetic beliefs with his historical

²³⁹ See: Aslan, *ZEALOT*; Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

²⁴⁰ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*. p.XI.

surroundings in order to appeal to a mass audience, and further, what that appeal can tell about the historical period.

Graham's eschatology took two main forms. In the first he mixes contemporary geopolitics, news events, and demographics with passages from the Bible to construct a fantasy that creates a cosmic battle out of current events. The second form of prophecy Graham engages in uses the same biblical proof texts and current events to prove that the end of human history is nigh. The two modes of prophecy are related and can happen simultaneously but have two separate agendas. The former brings God into this world in an imminent way, situating current events into cosmic history by portraying news as a divine battle of good versus evil. By presenting history as divinely ordained, Graham's judgment could correspond to God's judgment on events ranging from President Truman's decision to remove General Douglas MacArthur from Korea to the decision to include prayer in public schools. The latter form of prophecy is better equipped to arouse anxiety. By mixing biblical prophecy with current events, Graham could state that each disturbing event is a sign of the approaching destruction and judgment of humanity. The only path out of this situation, which Graham calls "hope," is to accept Jesus Christ and live happily in Heaven while this world passes away.

Graham's use of anti-Communist rhetoric began early. In 1947, on one of his first solo crusades, Graham warned his listeners, "Communism is creeping inexorably in these destitute lands; into war-torn China, into restless South America... You should see Europe. It's terrible. There are Communists everywhere. Here, too, for that matter... Unless the Christian religion rescues these nations from the clutches of the

unbelieving, America will stand alone and isolated in the world.”²⁴¹ This formulation would be repeated over and over for years to come. “The Communists are everywhere.” Graham was convinced that Communism and Communists were around every corner, hiding in every shadow, and pulling every lever of power. If Communism is evil in Graham’s eyes, it is also powerful. This would become a recurring theme and sometime sticking point for Graham. Graham would go to great lengths to justify his fear of Communism, a position that led to him describing its many strengths.²⁴² The other trope in the above quote that would be often used by Graham in the coming decades is Christianity as the antithesis of and cure for Communism. Not only are the two at complete loggerheads but also it is the duty of Christianity and Christians to rid the world of Communists.

Politics of the late 40s and early 50s emboldened Graham, and his statements about Communism grew more heated. As mentioned above, two days before Graham’s seminal 1949 Los Angeles crusade, President Truman announced that the Soviet Union had successfully detonated an atomic bomb. Graham seized upon this new threat, warning his audience that “An arms race, unprecedented in the history of the world, is driving us madly toward destruction!”²⁴³ There could be no accommodation between Christianity and Communism. Graham told his listeners:

Western culture and its fruits had its foundation in the Bible, the Word of God, and in the revivals of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century. Communism, on the other hand, has decided against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion. Communism is not only an economic interpretation of life—Communism is a religion that

²⁴¹ Quoted in Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.101.

²⁴² At times this even meant drawing an explicit comparison between Christianity and Communism.

²⁴³ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.115.

is inspired, directed, and motivated by the devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God.²⁴⁴

To drive the point closer to home, Graham told his audience, “the Fifth Columnists, called Communists are more rampant in Los Angeles than any other city in America...In this moment I can see the judgment hand of God over Los Angeles. I can see judgment about to fall.”²⁴⁵

Here Graham’s fantasy of the cosmic ordering of the world is fully developed. Ever attuned to portents of the world’s decline, Graham connects the escalating arms race with the second coming of Christ. On the one hand, Graham’s belief in the impending second coming of Christ was bolstered and given new dramatic detail through the specter of atomic warfare. On the other hand, Graham projected a cosmic fantasy onto current events by equating the Soviet Union and its goals with that of Satan, and put the United States and its doings squarely on the side of God.

Graham’s Communist fantasy served as a foundation to important facets of his ministry. Firstly, he could use it to justify his conviction in the impending destruction of the planet. Always attuned to evangelistic possibilities, Graham used this fantasy to convince people that the time to convert was *now* because there might not be a later. Secondly, the cosmic schema allowed for an American evangelical civil religion in which God and Country are united against godless Communism. Graham’s civil religion had significant evangelical possibilities but even more important were the doors that such lines of thinking opened to politicians and businessmen. Lastly, equating God and America informed Graham’s perspective on internal critics and

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

dissenters in the U.S.; following his logic: if God's purpose and America's were one and the same, then to question that purpose was heresy. Both Graham's eschatology and his civil religion have long histories; in order to understand his position we need to briefly turn to those who came before him.

Thy Kingdom Come

Graham's eschatology has a name and a history. Dispensational pre-millennialism took root in the U.S. in the second part of the 19th century as a subcategory of a larger group of writing and thought called prophecy belief, which has a much longer history.²⁴⁶ As mentioned above, prophecy belief is a way of coding present day events with the symbolism of divine providence in order to say something about the impending future. This implies a moral judgment on the behavior of current peoples or countries, and in the Christian context was used to describe proper conduct for believers and the impetus for nonbelievers to convert before the eventual return of Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, prophecy belief is expressed in a genre called apocalypse. From the Greek word meaning to uncover or unveil that which is hidden, apocalyptic writings were attributed to semi-mythical prophets to add weight and religious tradition to their dire warnings of the future.²⁴⁷ The Jewish and early Christian

²⁴⁶ I will at times refer to the belief as dispensationalism or pre-millennialism to avoid the cumbersome dispensational pre-millennialism. However, it should be noted that the two terms are not necessarily connected, i.e., one could hold pre-millennial beliefs without being a dispensationalist and vice versa. Also dispensational pre-millennialism was never a monolithic movement, instead it was a loose set of beliefs that a number of Christians held along with the other varying tenets of their faith.

²⁴⁷ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*. p.23.

apocalyptic writings that made it into the canon include: the Book of Ezekiel, the Book of Daniel, the Revelation of John, and the “little apocalypse” in the Gospel of Mark. These texts would be used in the centuries to come by prophecy believers to interpret their world through the biblical texts in order to both pass judgment on their world and predict its future.

Prophecy belief flourished in different times, places, and circumstances but it remained a powerful undercurrent in Christian belief. From Joachim of Fiore in the Middle Ages to early Reformation thinkers such as Thomas Müntzer, prophecy belief has proved itself a powerful agent of social change beyond an obscurant theological pursuit. Nor was prophecy belief confined to those of lower educational backgrounds; for example, Sir Isaac Newton devoted the end of his career to study of the anti-Christ and second coming (Voltaire said of this stage in Newton’s life: “Sir Isaac Newton wrote his comment upon the Revelation to console mankind for the great superiority he had over them in other respects”).²⁴⁸

The precursors to Graham’s form of prophecy belief were imported from England in the middle to late 19th century, largely by a man named John Nelson Darby.²⁴⁹ Darby is credited with developing and helping popularize a type of Dispensational pre-millennialism.²⁵⁰ This term refers to an eschatological belief that holds two fundamental beliefs; first, that history is ordered in seven distinct eras, or dispensations, and second, that the second coming of Jesus will occur before the

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p.66.

²⁴⁹ Strozier, *Apocalypse*. p.183.

²⁵⁰ Of course there were a great many other authors of the belief system but Darby is regularly credited with its inception so we will not complicate that historical simplification here.

millennium, referring to the thousand years of peaceful rule that will predate the final judgment of the world and its inhabitants—according to the Book of Revelation. This latter belief was a result of an array of disappointments and setbacks for Protestant Christians in the late 19th century. The general consensus before the rise of dispensationalism was post-millennialism, which held that Jesus would return after one thousand years of peaceful rule. The distinction can easily be overstated but the two positions represent a fundamental difference of worldview. Post-millennialism understood Christian duty as calling for believers to make the world a progressively better place. They believed the world was getting better and with work and assistance from above Christians could bring about the millennium themselves. Pre-millennialists, on the other hand, believed that the world was getting progressively worse and only by direct and dramatic intervention from God would the millennium begin. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Protestant establishment and liberal Protestants, such as the Social Gospel Movement, held a more post-millennial view, while the more conservative Protestants began to embrace pre-millennialism. The latter were influential in penning a massive twelve-volume set of conservative doctrinal positions between 1910 and 1915 called *The Fundamentals*.²⁵¹

One of the defining features of dispensationalism is its strong stance on a literalist understanding of the Bible. This too has its roots in the fundamentalist and modernist Protestant split at the turn of the 20th century. In general the modernists (who were usually post-millennial) put less emphasis on belief in the Bible as literal truth and more on its ability to teach ethical lessons. In turn, the new fundamentalists

²⁵¹ Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. p.41.

doubled down on their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible and began to use it as a litmus test of true Christianity. A literalist reading of the Bible made sense for dispensationalists because of the nature of their prophetic program. They took words or phrases from the Bible and applied them to current or historical events. By doing so they believed that could intuit the timing of the second coming of Christ, even if most shied away from setting a precise date.

There has been a varying degree of belief and employment of dispensational prophecy belief since its popularization in the 19th century. On one side of the spectrum, some evangelists' entire ministry was devoted to prophecy. Men such as William Blackstone, who wrote the popular work *Jesus is Coming* in 1878, was an early convert to Darby's dispensationalist system and worked tirelessly to spread the message, especially as it pertained to the Jews and the land of Palestine.²⁵² Far from being a relic of the past, this type of prophecy believer is still at large today, as the continued popularity of works such as *Left Behind* makes clear.²⁵³ Though the works devoted to prophecy and detailing the second coming have sold millions of copies, it can be argued that another type of believer has been even more instrumental in making dispensationalism a hallmark of conservative Protestant Christianity. This latter type is the evangelist popularizer for whom dispensationalism is integrated into his larger message concerning salvation and who therefore does not preach solely on

²⁵² Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*. pp.185-186. Dispensationalists have long been concerned with the fate of Jews because they believe that the second coming is predicated on Jews occupying Jerusalem. Blackstone worked hard to create a Jewish state in Palestine, even working with Theodor Herzl to try to realize that dream.

²⁵³ See: Shuck, *Marks of the Beast*.

the eschatology even if it informs or at least fits into his broader framework of Christianity.

Dwight L. Moody laid the groundbreaking work of dispensationalist promotion in the 19th century. Moody was a traveling shoe salesman before becoming a Chicago evangelist and one of the most famous preachers of the second half of the 19th century. Like Graham, Moody was no theologian. He preferred to keep his message simple and strong, and leave it to others to squabble over the details.²⁵⁴ He was convinced by the dispensationalist doctrine even though it contradicted his otherwise optimistic outlook. What Moody saw in dispensationalism was at the very least a powerful weapon of evangelism. Moody said: “I have felt like working three times as hard ever since I came to understand that my Lord was coming back again. I look on this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a life-boat, and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can’.”²⁵⁵

There are many parallels between Graham and Moody. Both were firm believers in dispensationalism and yet both were involved in more temporal agents of change such as politics. Both were successful evangelists who by popularizing their own blend of evangelicalism also popularized dispensationalism. However, Graham’s career was much longer and he also had access to a much wider array of media to advance his cause. Because of that, Graham engaged in some explicit prophecy writing of his own.²⁵⁶ The best examples of this come late in his career in two works,

²⁵⁴ Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody, American Evangelist, 1837-1899*. pp.227-261.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. p.253.

²⁵⁶ Graham’s “own” writing was usually helped by a ghost writer; however, these qualifications need not worry us here because our goal is to view the public Graham, the cultural self-object.

Approaching Hoof Beats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (1982) and *Storm Warning* that was first published in 1995 with the subtitle “With the collapse of communism the nuclear threat has diminished. But ominous shadows of deceptive evil loom on the horizon” and was updated in 2010 with a change in subtitle to “Whether global recession, terrorist threats, or devastating natural disasters, these ominous shadows must bring us back to the Gospel.” Both of these books followed on the coattails of a surge of popularity in prophecy writing in the late 70s to the early 80s and mid-90s when Graham was more of an elder statesman and less a vanguard of the movement.

Graham’s earliest book length treatment on the apocalypse was *World Aflame* published in 1965. Here Graham uses nuclear flame as the central theme of his fantasy. He writes in the introduction:

At 5:30 A.M. on July 16, 1945, a light brighter than a thousand suns illuminated the desert sands of New Mexico. One scientist who was watching wept. “My God,” he exclaimed, “we have created hell.” From that day on our world has not been the same. We entered a new era of history—perhaps the last era.²⁵⁷

Later Graham explains that his book presents “the Biblical answer to world conflagration.”²⁵⁸ This was a position that Graham would take on every sort of problem. When asked at a press conference about the social unrest and the Civil rights movement, Graham characteristically responded, “On the dark horizon of the present moment... I see no other hope. There is really no other possibility I see... for solving the problems of the world than the coming again of Jesus Christ.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Graham, *World Aflame*. p.xiii.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p.xvi.

²⁵⁹ Quoted in Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.316.

Here we find the most distilled outlook that critics of dispensationalism have long pointed to. Above, Graham fantasizes about the impending destruction of the world and dooms all human attempts to ameliorate suffering to failure since only the second coming of Christ can bring about such peace. There is a doubly insidious quality to this line of thinking. Firstly, Graham and other dispensationalists believe that the world is becoming progressively worse and the Bible foretells many of the misfortunes that will precede the second coming, thus there is a certain pleasure in the suffering of others as it marks a step closer to the fantasized end. Secondly, because decline is understood as a positive step towards the end, why would dispensationalists do anything to try to change or lessen the suffering they see around them?

One final example from Graham's corpus will suffice to illustrate how seriously he took the dispensationalist system. At his groundbreaking revival in New York City in 1957, when he broke with the fundamentalists and set the stage for the new evangelicals, dispensationalism was very much part of the program. In a sermon titled "The Day to Come," Graham told his audience: "The Bible warns us against speculating on times and seasons and dates. But there is a period of time taught in the Bible that is called 'the last days.'"²⁶⁰ How does Graham know that he was living in "the last days"? Graham points to an increase in travel, technology, and entertainment, all of which he contends the Bible names as portents. "Now if ever a generation had a right to be moved by fear and get right with God, it's our generation. The headlines are screaming it to us."²⁶¹ Towards the end of the sermon he reminds his audience one last time before the altar call: "No, we don't know the time but read

²⁶⁰ Graham, *The Challenge: Sermons from Madison Square Garden*. p.156.

²⁶¹ Ibid. p.167.

the signs of the times, and the signs of the times would indicate that we're approaching that glorious moment when Christ is going to come back again."²⁶²

This is not the whole story. This fantasy is just one of many that Graham and other evangelicals entertained and therefore fit into their cognitive schema along with beliefs that held different impulses. In the following section on evangelical civil religion, we will see how a different interpretation of the same subject, Graham's view of moral lapses, affected national and international politics.

Evangelical Civil Religion

The logical conclusion to dispensational pre-millennialism would be to disengage with the secular world except for attempts to evangelize to it; the world is ending soon, so why even bother? This is rarely the case. More often, the driving force of dispensationalism is in the scrupulous observations of the secular world and the creative act of situating that data within Bible prophecy. This contributed to Graham's desire to understand the role of his country within the context of the divine drama but there were other forces at play. This section will examine the seemingly contradictory impulses in Graham, and in evangelicalism of the 50s, that caused him to simultaneously condemn and glorify American culture while ingratiating himself to people of power at every possible turn.

Graham's call for moral regeneration was in part informed by his cosmic fantasy of the approaching end times. In the L.A. crusade that was quoted above, Graham told his audience, "Unless the Western world has an old-fashioned revival,

²⁶² Ibid. p.170.

we cannot last!”²⁶³ This formulation played into the dispensationalist worldview in productive, albeit at times contradictory, ways. The dispensationalist notion that the world is deteriorating and will continue to do so until the return of Jesus informed Graham’s reading of social and geopolitical issues. He interpreted the rise of divorce rates and the nuclear armament of the Soviet Union as telltale signs of the impending second coming. These signs also called for Graham to spread the good word with increased vigor. When coupled with Graham’s patriotism, the question of the need for a revival became unclear. Do souls need to be saved because the end is nigh or is the goal to save the soul of the nation and triumph over Communism? The following quote illustrates how entangled these two beliefs could become. In a sermon published in 1951, Graham told his audience, “God’s mercy is staying and holding back His hand maybe one more year.” Graham was not foolish enough to set dates but on this occasion he came close to doing so.²⁶⁴

We may have another year, maybe two years to work for Jesus Christ, and ladies and gentlemen, I believe it’s all going to be over. Listen to me: I said a year ago that I believed we had five years. I said in Los Angeles one year ago that we had five years. People laughed; some sneered. I’d like to revise that statement and say that we may have two years. Two years, and it’s all going to be over. *Either we shall have a revival or judgment is going to fall upon this nation...*²⁶⁵

It is unclear whether Graham is referring to the ultimate judgment of the second coming or a judgment upon America and its place in God’s order. The sermon is entitled “Will God Spare America?” and the quote above is prefaced by a discussion

²⁶³ Quoted in Haberski, *God and War*. p.22

²⁶⁴ Graham was usually wise enough not to set hard dates about the inevitable return, but in 1950 he did set the outer limit to be the year 2000. See: Wacker, *America’s Pastor*. p.45.

²⁶⁵ Graham, *America’s Hour of Decision*. p.119. Emphasis in the original.

of the Lord's judgment and mercy. Graham believes that God's patience with America has just about run out.²⁶⁶ Graham is using the same language and imagery he invokes to discuss the final end of history itself. There is an incongruity between the beliefs and the actions called for therein. Will a revival save souls before the end or save a nation from collapse?

In one respect the calls for moral regeneration, and the concomitant emphasis on the current lack of morality, rather than fitting neatly into a theological schema are better understood in terms of the functions that they serve. As with the possibility of nuclear destruction, depiction of the lack of American morals was an important rhetorical device that allowed Graham to induce anxiety in his listeners, scaring them to the altar. At the same time Graham would constantly echo his belief that America was in the midst of "the greatest spiritual revival in American history."²⁶⁷

By employing such rhetoric, Graham is free to create the fantasy in which the U.S. is fighting a divine battle against the satanic Communists and will undoubtedly lose this battle if it strays too far from the word of God. At times this fantasy led Graham into uncomfortable positions. Graham was forced by the logic of his own rhetoric to claim that the Soviet Union was an extremely powerful force, strong enough to overthrow not only the U.S. but Christianity itself. To make this case, Graham was at times forced to describe the powerful foe in almost glowing terms. In a sermon called "Communism and Christianity" delivered in Little Rock, Arkansas, Graham told his audience that the Soviet Union was "masterminded by Satan

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Quoted in Wacker, *America's Pastor*. p. 47. Wacker points out that this paradox has a history reaching back to Puritan preaching techniques of colonial America and that Graham's childhood church was rooted in those tensions.

himself.”²⁶⁸ He then explains how Satan has set Communism up to “counterfeit” Christianity, i.e., it adopts a sacred text, rituals, etc.²⁶⁹ In listing all the attributes of Christianity and then constantly following each statement with “and so does Communism,” Graham ends up making the two sound exceedingly similar, on par with each other in many respects²⁷⁰. He no doubt would disagree with this position in almost any other circumstance.

This fetishization of Communism was shared by one of Graham’s contemporaries, one Joseph McCarthy, the junior Senator of Wisconsin. Seeking publicity and a divisive issue to ensure his reelection, he told the Ohio County Women’s Republican Club in Wheeling, West Virginia: “I have here in my hand a list of 205—a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the state department.”²⁷¹ Like Graham, McCarthy saw Communists everywhere and believed them capable of nearly any nefarious act. Both men brought the level of discourse surrounding Communism down to a zero-sum game in which Communism was the ultimate evil, begat by Satan; any means to bring about its end were justified.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Graham, “Communism and Christianity.”

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Oakley, *God’s Country*. p.57.

²⁷² Graham said of McCarthy a year before his censure: “While nobody likes a watchdog, and for that reason many investigation committees are unpopular, I thank God for men who, in the face of public denouncement and ridicule, go loyally on in their work of exposing the pinks, lavenders, and the reds who have sought refuge beneath the wings of the American eagle and from that vantage point, try in every subtle, undercover way to bring comfort, aid, and help to the greatest enemy we have ever know—Communism.” Quoted in Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.166.

The red-scare of the 1950s was insidious in many ways but one was the dulling effect it had on social criticism. The historian, William Chafe, in his work, *The Unfinished Journey*, described the line of reasoning thusly: “If you protested the politics of anticommunism, you must be in Joseph McCarthy’s words, one of the “egg-sucking phony liberals,” of those “communists and queers,” one of those “pinkos.””²⁷³ The result of this logic was that the “crusaders of anticommunism had helped strike from the agenda of acceptable discussion many reforms of greatest significance to social activists.”²⁷⁴ Graham was a willing and active participant in demonizing Communism, and he equated any challenge to the status quo, social or political, as a part of the Communist threat.²⁷⁵ This colored Graham’s view of everything from the Civil rights movement to the protests against the war in Vietnam. In effect, by making the Soviet Union and Communism demonic fantasies, he elevated the U.S. as divinely sanctioned (even if it was, as we have seen above, in need of moral regeneration). Graham created a logic that prevented any critique or doubt of the people in charge of that divinely inspired country because doing so would be questioning God’s wishes. And, as we have seen in Chapter Two, the things most antithetical to Graham were questioning and doubt.

Graham’s dispensationalist beliefs, which informed how he situated current events into a larger divine framework, along with a thirst to be near and associated with people with political and economical power, led to a novel evangelical civil religion. Civil religion is a term coined by Jean Jacques Rousseau and made popular

²⁷³ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*. p.103.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ See: Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*. Chapters 3 and 4.

in academia by Robert Bellah in an essay published in 1967 entitled “Civil Religion in America.” Bellah bemoaned the appropriation of the term by his critics and supporters alike but stood by its usefulness.²⁷⁶ In “Civil Religion in America,” Bellah argued, “American civil religion is not the worship of the American nation but an understanding of the American experience in light of ultimate and universal reality.”²⁷⁷ Leaving aside the qualitative thrust of Bellah’s argument, that is the benefits he saw in civil religion during the trying times of the Vietnam war, his basic definition will be sufficient here for our argument. We will, however, keep in mind the warning from Raymond Haberski, Jr. when he says: “Civil religion is a strange beast; it can often appear to mean almost anything to anyone at anytime.”²⁷⁸

In terms of Bellah’s definition, what we mean by evangelical civil religion is an understanding of the American experience in light of a particular understanding of ultimate and universal reality, an evangelical one. This means an understanding of the direction of the country, politically and socially, through the lens of Graham’s neo-evangelicalism, and combining the prospects of both so that the success of one cannot happen without the success of the other. When evangelicalism is strong and prosperous, so too is the U.S., and vice versa.

Graham was not alone in thinking that strengthening American Christianity would also strengthen the nation. President Eisenhower, who enacted the term “under God” into the pledge of allegiance in 1954 and “In God We Trust” on U.S. currency in 1956, said after signing the former bill: “We are affirming the transcendence of

²⁷⁶ See: Bellah and Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion*. Particularly the introduction.

²⁷⁷ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America.” p.54.

²⁷⁸ Haberski, *God and War*. p.5.

religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource, in peace or in war."²⁷⁹ Graham and Eisenhower were linked from the beginning of Eisenhower's candidacy. Eisenhower, who was not a member of any church denomination before he was elected, asked Graham which church in D.C. he would recommend.²⁸⁰ Eisenhower ran on slogans such as "Faith in God and Country; that's Eisenhower—how about you?"²⁸¹ Eisenhower also believed in, or at least used the rhetoric of, a cosmic battle when it came to geopolitics. In his inauguration address he said how he would fight against Communism: "Forces of good and evil are massed and armed and opposed as rarely before in history... freedom is pitted against slavery; lightness against dark."²⁸² Eisenhower stressed the need for American religiosity to combat Communism, even if there were signs he wasn't particularly religious himself. A comical example of this inconsistency occurred once during a cabinet meeting, which newly began with a short prayer; when his secretary slipped him a note reminding him that they had forgotten the prayer, he blurted out: "Oh, goddammit, we forgot the silent prayer."²⁸³

Whatever Eisenhower's personal religious beliefs may have been, his public pronouncements were in line with Graham's.²⁸⁴ When Graham held a news conference after the Supreme Court decision to ban prayer in public school, he stated: "I am opposed to the ruling of the Supreme Court... I think that this is a nation under

²⁷⁹ Ibid. p.38.

²⁸⁰ Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*. p.39.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Oakley, *God's Country*. p.148.

²⁸³ Ibid. p.153.

²⁸⁴ See: Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*. Pp51-55.

God, and I think we must recognize God in our national life.”²⁸⁵ Graham had a much more detailed fantasy about how the ‘lightness against dark’ was represented. Though Eisenhower may not have believed all of Graham’s theology, he endorsed it, thereby legitimizing Graham’s cosmic fantasy.

For Graham, his divine schema of providentially inspired America versus the Satanic Soviet Union was colored and informed by his dispensationalist beliefs. Such beliefs stated:

But Jesus says the kingdom will never come until the Prince of Peace has His rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords in the hearts of men. Communism will never bring it. The United Nations will never bring it. It will come only at the climactic point in history when Christ Himself shall take over and take control. Then shall the kingdom of God come.²⁸⁶

Through Graham’s political connections, his popularity in the mainstream media, and his unofficial place as the face of ecumenical Protestantism in the U.S., this distinctive fundamentalist doctrine of dispensationalism entered into the mainstream consciousness in a powerful way. It was not embraced by everyone who heard it or even by all those who followed Graham, but Graham gave dispensationalism a much larger audience as well as a respectability it would have never enjoyed without him.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Billy Graham’s eschatological beliefs, namely dispensational pre-millennialism, particularly as they pertain to the atomic bomb, the Soviet Union, the U.S.A., and the impending end of history. By themselves, these

²⁸⁵ Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*. p.71.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. p.39.

beliefs constitute an interesting, if arcane, facet of the burgeoning neo-evangelical movement in the 1950s. There is also heuristic value in viewing these beliefs from different angles, particularly from the position that Graham's beliefs are an expression, or refraction, of his surrounding culture.

One of the most useful cultural spaces for examining these views is the arena of race. Between the Supreme Court decision on *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the burgeoning civil rights movement, and a rise in racial violence, the issue of race became the center of domestic consternation in the 1950s (and 60s and beyond) to match the anxiety of the foreign Cold War. Billy Graham was, in spite of his desire not to be, confronted with the same questions that those in power had to face.

The historiography on Graham's relationship to the civil rights movement and racial justice is by no means unanimous in its judgment of Graham's role during this time. On the one side, historians such as Michael G. Long have condemned Graham for possessing the ability to have a great effect on racial tensions but ignoring or missing that chance.²⁸⁷ On the other side of the spectrum, historians such as Grant Wacker are more sympathetic in their judgment, viewing Graham as progressive considering his southern upbringing and fundamentalist background.²⁸⁸ In my view the historian Stephen Miller strikes closest to the truth with a middle ground. Miller understands Graham as a racial moderate whose dedication to law and order and what Miller calls the "politics of decency" exclude the possibility of Graham ever embracing the methods or what he considered the radical ideas of the civil rights

²⁸⁷ See: Long, *The Legacy of Billy Graham*; Long, *Billy Graham and the Beloved Community*.

²⁸⁸ See Wacker, *America's Pastor*.

movement.²⁸⁹ Most importantly, Miller explicitly connects Graham's theology, his desire to be politically active, and his place as a representative of the 'New South'—what will later become the Sunbelt—with Graham's views on the civil rights movement. Miller notes:

Graham's behavior in the latter half of the Eisenhower years shaped the remainder of his engagement with the civil rights movement, as well as the broader political trajectory of the South... he endorsed and advocated a politics of decency, which invoked evangelical faith, combined with law and order, towards moderate ends... Here, as with so many areas of Graham's career, the spheres of religion and politics blended almost beyond distinction.²⁹⁰

Graham blended politics and religion as pertains to the civil rights movement in two primary ways. The first way, similar to that of many of the white men in power at the time, was to view the civil rights movement through the lens of the Cold War. Graham, who through personal notes passed along by J. Edgar Hoover, by the early 60s would temper his calls for racial justice by voicing concerns about the “subversive groups penetrating the civil rights movement.”²⁹¹ Indeed, this concern eventually extended to Martin Luther King Jr. himself, even though Graham publicly endorsed King during his NYC crusade in 1957. In 1963, during the height of the Birmingham protests, Graham wished that King would “put the brakes on a little bit.”²⁹² This happened while King was composing his “Letter from the Birmingham City Jail,” which chastised the “white moderate who is more devoted to ‘order’ than

²⁸⁹ See: Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. p.65.

²⁹¹ Ibid. p.94.

²⁹² Ibid.

to justice.”²⁹³ King’s associate, Fred Shuttlesworth, was even more direct, declaring: “we have had the brakes on too long.”²⁹⁴

The other register in which Graham addressed the crisis was one of sin and salvation. As we have seen throughout the preceding chapters, the central tenet of Graham’s ministry was conversion, the desire to convert, thus evangelism. What mattered most was changing the heart of man to love Christ. Without this change nothing else could get better. And, as we have seen in this chapter, for Graham the acceptance of Christ into one’s heart and Christ’s physical return to earth were intimately linked. And this was precisely how he framed the question of race relations. On the one hand Graham could say: “Non-segregation thus cannot be forced or legislated. There must be a process of education and faith in Christ.”²⁹⁵ And on the other he could state: “Only when Christ comes again, will the little white children of Alabama walk hand in hand with little black children.”²⁹⁶

This is the same paradox we encountered earlier concerning dispensationalism. The first quote implies that integration would be possible through some sort of “process of education and faith in Christ”—and the critique of *Brown Vs. Board* and civil rights legislation should not be overlooked. The second quote implies that nothing can be done temporally that will solve the problem of segregation, only the Second Coming will do that. This is the same Second Coming that will destroy the entire world and pass judgment on each and every human. The

²⁹³ Ibid. p.95.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p.25

²⁹⁶ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.296.

call for temporal action and a reliance on transcendent means do not easily square with one another.

Contemporary political powers urged Graham's involvement. In the spring of 1956, Alabama Congressman Frank Boykin wrote to Eisenhower to recommend Graham to help calm the rising tensions in his state. Boykin believed the situation was important not only because of the rise in violence but also: "the Communists are taking advantage of it."²⁹⁷ Boykin told Eisenhower: "I believe our own Billy Graham could do more than any other human in this nation; I mean to quiet it down and to go easy and in a Godlike way, instead of trying to cram it down the throats of our people all in one day."²⁹⁸ Eisenhower took Boykin's advice and sent a letter requesting Graham's assistance in convening participants open to "promoting both tolerance and progress in our race relations problem."²⁹⁹ Graham was happy to help and he also felt it his place to advise the President from getting too involved himself, telling him "it might be well to let the Democratic party bear the brunt of the debate... I hope particularly before November you are able to stay out of this bitter racial situation that is developing."³⁰⁰

We gain a greater understanding of the disparity between Graham's theological stance on race relations and his role as an active, if moderate, shaper of public opinion, if we view Graham's stance as reflective of the culture he represents. As a moderate, white evangelical, Graham is signaling a distinct break from his fundamentalist forebears, most of whom were still vociferously condemning any

²⁹⁷ Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*. p.53.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.201.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. pp.201-202.

attempt at integration. By allowing that true integration and peaceful race relations will occur only after the Second Coming, Graham is establishing a critical distance from the civil rights movement, its organizers, and its goals. Strengthening that distance was the explicit critique of the movement's tactics whenever they violated the law or threatened the status quo. Graham forged a moral position that did not defend the indefensible segregationist position but also washed his and other white evangelicals' hands of ongoing problems such as institutionalized racial biases or de facto segregation.

In essence, Graham became the exemplar of how white conservative Protestants could support the ideal of integration while limiting their own responsibility to do so with the twin reasoning of there would be no improvement until Jesus comes and/or he is accepted individually, and that any action that questions the status quo is a win for the Communists because it weakens the moral standing of the United States. Graham was supportive of the cause only as long as no direct divisive action was required on his part. In doing so, he became a model for white evangelicals for decades to come on the question of race.

Conclusion

This project has traced Graham's role as a cipher as well as remedy for the deep cultural anxieties of his day. The goal was not to find the 'real' Graham but rather to understand the public, ideal Graham—the one that he and his team put forward and that the public consumed. We confined ourselves to the first decade and a half of his career, the years between 1949-1965. Now, in one last illustrative story of Billy Graham, we are going to do something a little different; we are going to look at an episode in the life of Graham when his feeling for the pulse of the nation was off, when he floundered publicly before settling on a safe, stable position, an episode that—along with Watergate scandal that directly followed it—diminished Graham's cultural standing. This concerns Graham's involvement in the Vietnam War.

Examining the story in which Graham falters illustrates how great was his prior success. In a culture racked by ambiguity and plurality Graham offered certainty. To an increasingly gender equal society Graham offered structure and hierarchy. In a nuclear age with warring super-powers Graham embraced the fear and turned it into a message of hope—at least for those who believed. In spite of all those successes, Graham could not manage to serve in this therapeutic capacity forever. The times change and the culture changes along with it. Probing Graham's failure to remain a cultural self-object during the Vietnam War helps to illustrate just how remarkable his earlier career was.

Graham's response, or lack thereof, to the Vietnam War has been roundly criticized by most academics, even the most supportive ones, and ignored by

contemporary hagiologists.³⁰¹ For our purposes, Graham's actions concerning the War are illustrative not because they are condemnable but because they show, for the first time, Graham out of step and unsure of how to proceed. Graham as cultural self-object was fragmenting, breaking apart, just as the culture around him was fragmenting. No longer could Graham make pronouncements with his unwavering certainty and expect to speak for such a large coalition. In order to see these cracks in his certainty we are going to turn to both the ideal public Graham as we have been doing for the last three chapters as well as the secret Graham, the one uncovered by historians and declassified recently; doing so will help show both Graham's uncertainty and dissimulation.

In his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*, Graham says very little about Vietnam. He mentions that he made two trips to Vietnam during President Johnson's years in office and that the LBJ had talked frequently about the War but never about military strategy.³⁰² Graham mentions that Nixon was critical of LBJ's decision to stop the bombing offensive, and asked Graham for his prayers for victory in the War.³⁰³ Graham never tells us what he thinks of the recommencement of bombing because he segues seamlessly into how Nixon wanted Graham to perform all of the inaugural prayers himself, with Graham humbly protesting that the prayers needed to be more ecumenical.³⁰⁴ One of the only other references to the War in *Just As I Am* occurs earlier when Graham is discussing his relationship with then President-elect

³⁰¹ Wacker, *America's Pastor*. p.238, said "[The Vietnam War] placed a stain on his record."

³⁰² Graham, *Just as I Am*. p.415.

³⁰³ Ibid. p.450.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

Kennedy. The two played golf (and posed for photos) together, and in the clubhouse after the round, Graham tells us that he heard Kennedy say, “We can’t allow Vietnam to the Communists.”³⁰⁵ This, says Graham, “was the first time I heard that Vietnam—that far off country in the Orient—was such a problem.”³⁰⁶ During LBJ’s and especially Nixon’s presidencies, two men to whom Graham was far greater disposed, Graham often referred to Vietnam as Kennedy’s war in an attempt to deflect criticism towards Kennedy’s successors.³⁰⁷

Graham’s position on the War changed from, as one historian put it, “jut-jawed support... to professed neutrality.”³⁰⁸ By the end of the War, in 1973, Graham had settled on his ‘official’ position: that it was a pointless and senseless act but one taken in good faith by the American leaders.³⁰⁹ Graham told William Martin in the late 80s (when Martin was interviewing Graham for his biography) that he had made only a “lone remark” to the contrary, and an offhand remark at that.³¹⁰ In response to rising criticism of his role as a ‘White House Chaplain’ that put a godly stamp of approval on whatever actions the Presidents wished, Graham replied that “God has called me to be a New Testament evangelist, not an Old Testament prophet!”³¹¹ Graham also insisted that while he did talk with the Presidents about the War, he

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p.395.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*. p.235.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. pp.423-424.

³¹⁰ Ibid. p.423 Graham could not quite remember what that remark was and provided Martin with *two* possible instances of it. See note p.694.

³¹¹ Ibid. p. 423.

never gave tactical or military advice.³¹² Whereas the former statement rings true, the latter certainty does not.

Graham's supposed political neutrality has been called into questions many times over the years, from his secret campaign against the Catholic JFK to his nearly explicit endorsement of Nixon, but few people knew at the time the extent to which Graham was asked and offered his opinions on policy and military matters.³¹³ One notable example of this appeared in a letter Graham wrote to Nixon in April of 1969 that was declassified in 1989. In this letter, Graham apprised the President on the opinion of missionaries in Vietnam, and by extension his own, of what to do about the War. They advised pulling out and letting the South Vietnamese fight in the "Oriental way" instead of the methods learned at West Point,³¹⁴ "using Oriental methods which seem brutal and cruel in sophisticated Western eyes, but which are being used every day by the Viet Cong to spread terror and fear to the people."³¹⁵ He said they should emphasize propaganda and "use the North Vietnamese defectors to bomb and invade the north. Especially let them bomb the dikes which could overnight destroy the economy of North Vietnam."³¹⁶

After Graham sent the letter to Nixon (and then sent it again six months later to Henry Kissinger, noting that Defense Secretary Melvin Laird was impressed by it),

³¹² Wacker, *America's Pastor*. p.235.

³¹³ Graham tacitly endorsed a number of different candidates, even George W. Bush, which was well after his supposed break from politics after Watergate, all the while maintaining political neutrality.

³¹⁴ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.366.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Wacker, *America's Pastor*. p.236.

his public pronouncements on Vietnam oscillated.³¹⁷ Usually he claimed neutrality or excused himself, claiming that he was no social justice warrior but an evangelist, and yet as the War dragged on, he was driven to make more substantial statements. In 1972, Graham felt compelled to offer a more complete position after the Reverend Ernst Campbell of New York's Riverside Church preached and then published a sermon entitled "An Open Letter to Billy Graham."³¹⁸ In the sermon, Campbell declared Graham's tacit support of LJB and his vocal support of Nixon, along with his claims of neutrality, a "moral 'cop-out.'"³¹⁹ In response, Graham gave two interviews to the *New York Times* in January of 1973, in which he defended his claim of neutrality but began to shift his emphasis to supporting a quick, peaceful resolution and voicing his discontent over how the War had proceeded.

In the later of the two interviews, Graham expressed his discouragement over the resumption of bombing and his dissatisfaction with the War. At the same time Graham minimized the effects of the war and was critical of protestors, saying: "There are hundreds of thousands of deaths attributed to smoking... A thousand people are killed every week on the American highways... and half of those are attributed to alcohol. Where are the demonstrations against alcohol?"³²⁰ Nor were such minimizations unique; in November of 1969 after the story of the My Lai massacre became public—wherein U.S. forces had reportedly killed five hundred men, women, and children in cold blood—Graham mused, "We have all had out

³¹⁷ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.367.

³¹⁸ Wacker, *America's Pastor*. p.237; Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.422.

³¹⁹ Wacker, *America's Pastor*. p.237.

³²⁰ Martin, *A Prophet with Honor*. p.423.

Mylais [sic] in one way or another, perhaps not with guns, but we have hurt others with a thoughtless word, an arrogant act or a selfish deed.”³²¹

In the end, Graham waffled and dissembled, and as Grant Wacker has said, “his waffling looked like he was just putting his finger to the wind.”³²² In retrospect, Graham’s public professions of neutrality and his private correspondence with the Presidents are damning, and even at the time Graham’s indecisiveness and support of the Presidents cost him popularity and prestige—especially Graham’s ardent support of Nixon during the Watergate scandal. Graham’s public image would survive, but his prestige or cultural capital would never again be the same.

It should not be surprising that the fractured late 60s and early 70s would spell the end to Graham’s ability to speak to and for so many. Many of the attributes that made him so popular in 50s—his respect for power and the rule of law, his mythologized perfect American past, and his absolute certainty in *certainty*—made him anachronistic in the late 60s and 70s. No, the surprising fact is that a religious leader was so central, so popular, and so prestigious in the first place.

We find in Graham’s success the strongest argument for the deep desires of so many of his time. The need to turn back the clock on commercialism, managerial industrialization, the shifting gender roles, and the doubt thrown upon down-home religion contributed to the fantasy that Graham personified. During the 50s and early 60s Graham could invoke these fears and embody their resolution, something he could no longer do during the crisis of the Vietnam War.

³²¹ Wacker, *America’s Pastor*. p.237.

³²² Ibid. p.238.

Over the previous chapters we have examined the ways in which Graham presented his brand of neo-evangelicalism as a religion of certainty, one that resolves the confusing shifts in gender roles, and one that has insider knowledge of the impending destruction of the world. Graham and his creed captivated a generation of Americans and shifted the religious landscape of the country. When Graham arrived on the scene in the late 40s, anyone holding his conservative theological views was branded as a backwater fundamentalist. By the time Graham was finished, evangelicalism was at the center of American political, religious, and cultural life.

Billy Graham has shown us the value of certainty in religion, directed our attention to the proper role of men and women in the house, at work, and in church, and he has explicitly linked nuclear destruction with the inevitable second coming of Jesus Christ. Throughout all of this, Graham was acting not only as himself, as one person, but he was also functioning as a cultural self-object. Graham was reflecting, deflecting, and refracting the fears, hopes, and ideals of his historical period. He represented, in Kohut's psychological terms, a grandiose self-image, one in which the people who heard and internalized his words could take solace. The genius of Graham during his early years was his ability to simultaneously mirror and provide resolution to anxiety. For those confused by and scared of the new pluralistic society, Graham offered certainty. For those upset or befuddled by the new roles of women in culture, Graham offered fixed roles based on 'Biblical' stricture and therefore unquestionable truths. And for those of whom the existential terror of mankind creating the means of its own destruction was too much, Graham offered a fantasized sanctuary in the new life to come.

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